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Creativity and its development in students through creative English programs are the subjects of this report from the Dartmouth Seminar. David Holbrook's paper, "Creativity in the English Programme," maintains that English should be taught creatively to enhance the child's capacity to deal with his inner and outer experiences and to help him grow gracefully into maturity. Geoffrey Summerfield has recorded "A Short Dialogue on Some Aspects of That Which We Call Creative English" in which he redefines the word "creative" and indicates the need for free experimentation in the classroom, particularly to encourage conversation as a means of extending and refining the student's linguistic control and self knowledge. In "A Caveat on Creativity," Reed Whittemore assesses the dangers of becoming prescriptive in a creative program. Finally, Geoffrey Summerfield presents examples which demonstrate creative teaching in more than a dozen situations ranging from teaching haiku to choosing relevant literature for adolescents in racially tense areas. (JB)

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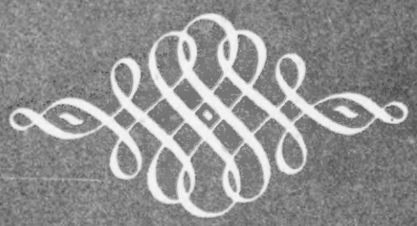
# CREATIVITY IN ENGLISH



GEOFFREY SUMMERFIELD

EDITOR

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THE DARTMOUTH SEMINAR PAPERS

# CREATIVITY IN ENGLISH

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# CREATIVITY IN ENGLISH

papers relating to
the Anglo-American Seminar
on the Teaching of English
at
Dartmouth College, New Hampshire
1966

edited by

GEOFFREY SUMMERFIELD

for
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# FOREWORD TO THE SERIES

The Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English was cosponsored by the National Association for the Teaching of English in the United Kingdom, the Modern Language Association of America, and the National Council of Teachers of English in the United States. Supported by funds from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, it met at Dartmouth College in August and September of 1966. Recommendations of the entire Seminar have been reported in two major volumes: *The Uses of English* by Herbert J. Muller (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967) and *Growth through English* by John Dixon (Reading, England: NATE, 1967; available in North America from MLA and NCTE).

This publication is one in the following series of six monographs presenting papers, summaries of discussion, and related materials being published for the cosponsoring associations by the National Council of Teachers of English.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Creativity in English* | Geoffrey Summerfield, editor |
| *Drama in the English Classroom* | Douglas Barnes, editor |
| *The Uses of Myth* | Paul Olson, editor |
| *Sequence in Continuity* | Arthur Eastman, editor |
| *Language and Language Learning* | Albert Marckwardt, editor |
| *Response to Literature* | James R. Squire, editor |

# EDITOR'S PREFATORY NOTE AND POSTSCRIPT

What follows is *not* a resumé of a discussion that went on for four weeks between Professors Albert Kitzhaber of Oregon, Wayne Booth and James Miller, Jr., of Chicago, John Fisher of MLA, Reed Whittemore, David Holbrook, and myself. At this late hour, responding to an unexpected commission, I find it impossible to summarise or even accurately recapture the tones, nuances, exchanges, differences, perplexities, and pleasures of four weeks' conversation.

The paper by David Holbrook was prepared to serve as a basis for discussion; my own paper and my examples of "creative" work draw on many of the issues that arose in our discussion, but should be read as a *personal* statement, which makes no claims to represent the views of the group. No one else should be blamed for my opinions, uncertainties, inconsistencies, and insistences. As for the bouts of incoherence, I have to confess that the paper was written in odd bursts, snatched here and there during the hurly-burly of term-time, which may perhaps be as it should be, since that is the way most of us as teachers have to do everything.

I would like to take this opportunity to say, from this side of the Atlantic, how grateful I am for the pleasure of meeting so many hospitable, good-humoured, lively, and indefatigable American colleagues, and for the solicitude of Jim Squire, who kept us well oiled. The seminar has come in for some rather harsh criticism in some quarters: maybe the moral is that such things are what you make them. For some it was a fruitful and animating dialogue.

My thanks are due to Professor Michael Oakeshotte and Messrs. Bowes and Bowes for permission to quote from *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind*, and to Sir Peter Medawar, F.R.S., and Messrs. Methuen for permission to quote from *The Art of the Soluble*.

I wish also to thank Mr. Wilfred Jackson, the Headmaster of Manor Park Junior School, Coventry, and M. W. E. Escritt, the Headmaster of Park Grove Secondary Modern School, York, for permission to teach in their schools and for allowing me to draw on this experience; and Mr. Peter Searby, who collaborated with me in the Chinese Poetry Project. My greatest debt is to Mr. Jack Trevena, Head of the English Department at Park Grove School, who has been an ideally tolerant and generous colleague.

The University of York GEOFFREY SUMMERFIELD
April, 1967

Since completing my contributions to this document, I have been asked a simple, direct, and rather unnerving question: How far is my position representative of the current practise of teachers of English in Britain? Statistically speaking, I have no answer at all. But judging by the continuing ferment of discussions and reappraisals to be observed at numerous branches of NATE and in the work of many colleagues and friends in schools, I would hazard the guess that perhaps half of the teachers of English are moving, at least for some of their timetable, in some such direction, in accordance with the promptings of *their own* lights. And about a half of the rest feel that it is perhaps time to bestir themselves. And about half of the rest observe with wryly raised, half-sympathetic, half-sceptical eyebrows. And the remainder are not convinced that the grass is greener on this side of the fence; indeed, see not grass but corn. The publishers, meanwhile, are beginning to cash in on psychedelic textbooks, palpitating with vibrant sensitivity and prudential exercises. It's clear that we shall have to keep our wits about us and try to refrain from turning out band-

waggons in our wheelwright's shops. Without intelligent alertness, the drift that I have tried to chart could degenerate into a mere passing fad. What each of us needs is a coherent, inclusive, and personally achieved "philosophy" of the subject. What I offer is a few tentative steps in the direction of such a philosophy.

Oxford
September, 1967

G. S.

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# CREATIVITY IN THE ENGLISH PROGRAMME

David Holbrook

Creativity cannot satisfactorily be introduced into an English program unless creativity is accepted as a basis of our approach to English teaching as an art. Effective English teaching, in that it has to do with the whole complex of language in our lives, has to do with the whole problem of the individual identity and how it develops. In this words are crucial, and so in English teaching we cannot separate words from the dynamics of personality, nor from the processes of symbolism by which human beings seek to deal with their inward life.

Because the creative processes by which we develop and sustain an identity are intuitive (so that civilisation begins anew in every child) and because adults are naturally endowed to foster these processes, it is often possible for a teacher who is convinced of its importance simply to start creative work off, and it will "go" and yield satisfactory results at once. Give infants sand, water, and paint, and they will immediately begin to work as energetically as if they were adults being paid by piecework rates. But even so, various difficulties will arise—on the one hand of boredom or of blockages, of personal problems interfering with

creative work, of a theme being exhausted, of judging results, and of defending the child's need for such work against those who suggest pupils should be doing something more "practical" or "useful." On the other hand there are problems of following up, linking creativity with literature, and developing powers of expression. So, while the encouragement of creative effort depends upon intuitive capacities in the teacher and natural energies in the child, it also helps if the teacher has a conscious understanding of what is involved.

So, before we suggest how creativity may be introduced in practical terms, it is necessary to establish its nature and purpose clearly. And, as I have suggested in my opening paragraph, this is no less than the point of all English. What we are concerned with in English, essentially, is literacy in its deepest and widest sense—the capacity to use words to deal with inner and outer experience. In my view the former comes first: that is, it is no good trying to develop "practical" uses of language unless we foster first of all an adequate capacity to be on good terms with oneself, and to find inward order, by means which *include* words. This last point implies in fact that in considering creativity in school we need not stop at words—a child making a pot, coming in first in a race, or painting a picture is making a constructive achievement that will contribute to his articulateness, because it contributes to his strength of personality. So, in the widest sense, literacy depends upon creative living as a whole—and a school which inhibits spontaneity at large will be restricting the development of literacy (not least in the practical sphere) and vice versa.

What goes on between the deeper life of our being, the conflicting dynamics of the personality, and the ego that seeks to integrate these is still a matter which remains dark to us, complex and intangible, and as yet barely investigated. But what we may perhaps accept is that in child and adult, and in all civilisations, there is a primary need to symbolise. Susanne Langer says:

> I believe there is a primary need in man. . . . This basic need, which

> certainly is obvious only in man, is the *need of symbolization.* The symbol-making function is one of man's primary activities, like eating, looking, or moving about. It is the fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time. Sometimes we are aware of it, sometimes we merely find its results, and realize that certain experiences have passed through our brains and have been digested there.[1]

This primary need is insufficiently catered to in the culture of our Western society and in its education. And in this deficiency there is a danger. For the symbolism referred to here is not merely the symbolism of outward communication.

What then is the function of this symbolism? This can only be answered by considering the complexity of the structure of our inner world.

Here perhaps it would be as well to try to offer a definition of "inner" or "psychic" or "subjective" reality. Since the influence (and sometimes even the existence) of this inner world is often denied, perhaps we could take a psychoanalytical statement:

> The mind or psyche has a reality of its own, separate and distinct from the reality of the outer material world. It has its own enduring and not easily alterable organization. The psyche has, one might almost say, a kind of solid substantiality of its own which we cannot alter at will, and which we have to begin by accepting and respecting. Thus, we cannot ourselves *feel* differently from the ways in which we discover that we do feel. We do not choose what we shall feel, we simply discover that we are feeling that way, even if we have some choice in what we do about its expression. Our feelings are instantaneous, spontaneous, and at first unconscious reactions which reveal the psychic reality of our make-up. At any given moment we are what we are, and we can become different only by slow processes of growth. All this is equally true of other people who cannot, just because we wish it, suddenly become different from what they are. Psychic reality, the inner constitution and organisation of each individual mind, is highly resistant to change, and goes its own way much less influenced by the outer world than we like to think.
>
> Our conscious mental operations do not convey the full force of this stubborn durability of psychic reality, since it is relatively easy to change our ideas, to alter our decisions, to vary our pursuits and interests, and so on; but we can do all that without becoming

[1] Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 40-41.

> very different basically as persons. Our mental life appears to be a freely adaptable instrument of our practical purposes in the outer material world, as no doubt it should be. The closer, however, we get to matters involving the hidden pressures of emotions, the more do we recognise the apparent intractability of psychic reality. The infatuated man cannot subdue his infatuation, the person who worries cannot stop worrying, the hyper-conscientious person who works to death cannot relax, the man with an irrational hate cannot conquer his dislike, the sufferer from bad dreams cannot decide not to have them. . . .[2]

Much intellectual effort is devoted to the denial of this intractable inner world. One often finds scientists—especially Behaviourists—who seem to have a special need to deny its existence because they cannot fit it into their neat intellectual scheme of things—since this world does not lend itself to objective exploration. To the poet, however, it is acceptable, since it is the world of the "unknown self" with which he cooperates in his creativity.

This inward life can only be approached in terms of metaphor. For reasons which don't yet seem clear, access to our deeper areas of inward life is too painful to be endured, possibly because we fear most our very inner weaknesses and need to defend our being against interference that we fear might destroy us.[3] We can only work on inner reality by dreams, hidden meanings, symbolic displacement, and metaphor, and by this symbolic *work* "construct something upon which to rejoice." Of course, psychoanalysts interpret symbols explicitly in the therapeutic situation (as when they tell patients what their dreams "mean"), but even so, much of the patient's cure in psychotherapy may well be brought about by the integrative effect of his own creative dreaming and phantasy.[4]

The creative dream is a manifestation of the integrative forces of the ego. The creative processes of symbolism go on

[2]Henry J. S. Guntrip, *Personality Structure and Human Interaction* (London: Hogarth Press), pp. 218-219.

[3]See "Communicating and Not Communicating," in *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, D. W. Winnicott, ed. (London: Hogarth Press, 1965).

[4]See H. Westman, *The Springs of Creativity* (New York: Atheneum Publishers. 1961).

all the time in "normal" people. Recent research in New England has even come to postulate normal night dreaming as an activity that keeps us alive as beings. The processes of the inward life are always in dynamic quest for solution but are never solved: in order to sustain consciousness we need to make continual use of our inner resources, seeking to relate our inward world to the outer world by metaphor, by "carrying across," as in poetry, music, painting. But, of course, the external world can never be brought to accord with our subjective world; there can only be a continual struggle to build bridges between them.

Here we may turn to a most useful paper by a Kleinian psychoanalyst, "Notes on Symbol Formation," by Hannah Segal:

> Symbols are needed not only in communication with the external world, but also in internal communication. Indeed, it could be asked what is meant when we speak of people being "well in touch with their unconscious." It is not that they have consciously primitive phantasies . . . but merely that they have some awareness of their own impulses and feelings. However, I think that we mean more than this; we mean that they have actual *communication* with their unconscious phantasies. And this, like any other form of communication, can only be done with the help of symbols. So that in people who are "well in touch with themselves" there is a constant free symbol formation, whereby they can be consciously aware and in control of *symbolic expression* of the underlying primitive phantasies. . . .
>
> The important aspect of internal communication is in the integration of earlier desires, anxieties and phantasies with the later stages of development by symbolisation. . . .[5]

That is, as we develop the capacity to work by symbolisation in infancy, as our first capacities for "play" and for words come to us, we have a backlog of problems of inward structure and identity to work on—and this work is done by all forms of symbolisation from dreams to high art. The maintenance of a satisfactory sense of who we are depends upon this effort. As Melanie Klein said:

> Phantasies—becoming more elaborate and referring to a wider variety of objects and situations—continue throughout development

[5] From *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Volume 38.

> and accompany all activities; they never stop playing a great part in mental life. The influence of unconscious phantasy on art, on scientific work, and on the activities of everyday life cannot be overrated. . . .[6]

In teaching English, we are concerned with words, which are symbols. As William Empson observed, the ambiguity and aura of each word reaches down into the dark depths of inner reality. Apart from their objective referents, words symbolise a myriad of experiences, inner and outer.[7]

The inner experiences are those in which (according to Melanie Klein) phantasy plays a large part—as the basis of identity. We are concerned with language and literature as a symbolic record of whole experience in which the emotional life plays a great part and to which phantasy is crucial. And so our work reaches down into those areas which are inaccessible except to the capacity to approach and engage the dynamics there by metaphor.

We are concerned with literacy over all its ranges, and we don't need much experience of teaching to know that literacy is related to problems of the inner world; for instance, a child whose mother has died is so shaken at these depths that she becomes unable to use words, she is "dumb with grief."[8] And, as we know, the person with a weak identity who finds himself in prison is often found to have lost the literacy he once had; the breakdown of personality in the asocial life has brought a forfeiture of literacy. To restore his literacy is to help restore some strength of personality in him.[9]

If we concern ourselves with literacy, then we must concern ourselves with the energies of the inner world and the

[6] Melanie Klein, *Our Adult World and Its Roots in Infancy*, p. 6.

[7] As Susanne Langer has pointed out, symbols are not proxy for their objects, but are vehicles for the conceptions of objects; and it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly "mean." So, ever our symbolisation of objective reality is an inward process in complex with the subjective and imaginative.

[8] See "Rose" in *English for the Rejected.*

[9] I base these remarks on a study on the teaching of literacy in prison to be published in 1968 by Manchester University Press, England, *Imprisoned Tongues*, by R. Roberts.

whole personality. And so we must concern ourselves with creativity, which is the approach to inner dynamics through symbolism, as a primary preoccupation of human beings in the preservation of identity.

Children know this—as they show whenever one establishes the impersonal conditions in which they may explore themselves in creative activity.

**ME**

**What am I?**
**A boy.**
**Why am I?**
**I can never arrive**
**At a satisfactory**
**Answer**
**As to why**
**I am.**
**But there must be a reason,**
**For without reason,**
**What is the point of**
**Me:**
**Being around to eat**
**Good food**
**And using up**
**Useful space,**
**So,**
**Why**
**Am I?**

**Adolescent boy in an "approved" school—i.e., a school for intelligent criminal youth.**

If creative work is as important as I believe it to be, it is by no means a minor topic—it is the topic of English. Unless we accept the primary importance of the process of creative symbolism, I do not see how we can really solve all the other problems of English adequately at all.

Another problem arises, however, because of the nature of creative effort itself. We often tend to approach problems of teaching English as if they can be solved intellectually, by exegesis and the manipulation of processes. While one does not wish in any way to deprecate the conscious use of the intellect, the truth is that creative symbolism is not controllable or manageable by intellect alone. The artist can be

no more than midwife to his creative dynamics, his intelligence cooperating with his symbolising function. Since creativity is a natural function in children, while the adult is naturally endowed to foster it, it must be allowed to develop naturally wherever possible—like the capacity to mother an infant. Over-zealous managing can impinge too much on the natural process and falsify it.

This has wide implications for the training of teachers to do creative work. It is not enough for teachers to be intellectually convinced merely—they need experience of creative work itself. A teacher who has painted pictures or taken part in spontaneous mime or drama or who has written poetry or fiction will have experienced the problems of "opening oneself to experience" and accepting one's own sensitivity—even one's fears and weaknesses—involved in this work. "Getting the feel of it" should therefore be part of the experience of student teachers and the teacher taking an institute course or other refresher course. Composing, improvising, experimenting with expression should be combined with seminars on children's poetry and other writing and on the aims of creative work.

There are other problems of individual capacity. Of course anyone is capable of "having a go" at creativity, but nothing can be achieved by those who are hostile, unwilling, or frightened of creativity or those who could only work at it mechanically if they were obliged to do it. Ideally, people should not be obliged to teach humane and imaginative subjects against their inclinations, though inevitably things are so arranged that they must. For any significant work in creativity we must rely on the ordinary good English teacher with a love of poetry and the creative teacher whose art comes naturally. Here, the problem is to make the timetable as flexible as possible so that those who wish to do creative work can have ample and undirected free periods to do whatever they decide to do, according to their individual lights. This happens in hundreds of English schools, but I do not know how much this is possible in America, where syllabuses seem more formal.

It would be wrong, however, to elevate creativity into a mystique. Any teacher who has a sensitive understanding of poetry and imaginative fiction has the grounding for an understanding of creative work with children. The fundamental problem is that of responding to symbolic expression. For instance—what does Blake's Sunflower symbolise, and how could I relate it to the symbolism in the following poem by a "backward" pupil?

A poem

A little yellow Bird sat on my window sill, he hop and popped about, he wisheld he cherped.
I tried to chash my little yellow bird, but he flew in to the golden yellow sun,

O how i wish that was my yellow brid.

To answer this requires a recognition that, while there is all the difference in the world between art poetry and the poetry of children, the *functions of symbolism in each are the same* because they are functions natural to man and their modes are archetypal. How we can tell what the child or the poet means depends upon our acquaintance with all kinds of creative art and with criticism which illuminates its symbolism. So the first need of a teacher of creativity is a wide acquaintance with art of all kinds.

Teachers also need to study the nature of the growth of personality in the inner world of children, helped by those who have observed children and especially the symbolism of their play and expression. This requires more attention to psychoanalytical studies of children than the study of partial functions, as by psychometrics. Here I can only append a list of those authorities I consider relevant and sound.

Attention to these inner needs will help us to solve the problems of how a concern with imaginative expression relates to the needs of the "real" world. The words in creative writing thus refer not only to outward objective referents, but to aspects of the subjective life which always colour our attitude to and our perception of subjective reality (as no one knows better than the scientist!). Here there are important changes taking place in concepts of the relationship

between culture and personal development. Freudian "instinct" theory, which sees the ego as an instrument of adaptation, is giving way to a recognition of the integrative function of the ego, to which at best culture is a means to wholeness and strength of inner resources. This problem in education is explored in a most relevant way by Marion Milner in *On Not Being Able to Paint.* The theoretical changes may be studied in the works of H. Guntrip.[10]

Our work is based on the assumption that by creating or responding to creativity, while these can never solve the problems of life, there can be partial and temporary gains in which experience takes on a new structure and wholeness, as one could demonstrate by taking, say, Mahler's *Ninth Symphony* or Beethoven's last piano sonata (Opus 111). Such a creative experience, when we possess it, can actually seem to bring us to the solution of a life-problem, even if we only say, "It made my problems seem unimportant" (which is a way of noting the "solving" effect of music, in soothing the nervous system by communicating a rich sense of content and structure). I have tried to show in my books how children do work on their life-problem by poetry—as do adults. Hardy, for instance, came to terms with the death of his wife by the great creative effort of his poems *Veteris Vestiges Flammae* (1912-13); Dostoevsky discovered the capacity for ruth and love by writing *Crime and Punishment;* Lawrence's whole *oeuvre* is devoted to his maxim, "To learn to love requires centuries of patient effort."

Children make transitions between the inner and outer world easily and intuitively use symbolism in the pursuit of inward strength and an adequate sense of reality. By adolescence, "shades of the prison house begin to close," and movement between the inward and outward life becomes more difficult, because more complex. The child makes his transitions under the shelter of his dependence on trusted

[10] Marion Milner, *On Not Being Able to Paint* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1963); Henry J. S. Guntrip, *Personality Structure and Human Interaction* (London: Hogarth Press), and *Studies of the Schizoid Personality,* in press.

adults (if he is fortunate). The adolescent needs group support for his identity, as he is not yet independent. But the mature adult has a rich culture of his own and a substantial ego to help integrate this inner self by the active relationship between these—which is cultural activity, including all that we mean by "English."

There are of course many ways besides English of helping the inner unknown self to grow up to maturity. Experience itself teaches, and so do relationships of all kinds. We learn much by living in good human institutions—for instance in schools and colleges where the atmosphere is humane and enrichening. Insight is gained by contemplation and from sympathetic contact with others. But the creative arts are one major source of insight into our inward problems, and of those some of the most important are poetry and imaginative fiction, because word-art uses the same language in which we think, conduct relationships, and deal with practical affairs. Poetic exploration should be at the centre of English teaching and a point at which the child's natural creative urge for symbolisation should meet that of the adult poet: the civilisation beginning anew in each child should meet the inheritance of the best in civilisation.

Having seen some of the inward problems to which poetry may contribute by helping us to work at our inner life, the next problem is how to tell what is *good* in creative work. How can a teacher be trained to tell when a child is truly engaged in such genuinely poetic activity? How can he foster the kinds of sincerity and genuineness he knows to be in great art? Here he can only learn by studying literature itself.

The essential problem is to know how to promote the true activity of "ontological investigation"—that is, the genuine exploration of the nature of the self in the world. We can only feel sure of recognising this by our experience of what true ontological investigation in art feels like. Again, in the classroom, this is a matter of trained intuition, gained by the experience of children and of creativity and such opportunities as seminar work, to help provide insight.

In fostering creativity the essential problem of teaching as an art is to be able to show one is able to *receive* the gifts from his exploration as the child makes them. As D. W. Winnicott points out, the child always requires a "loved" person standing by to whom to "give" his constructive achievements. There is no one way to promote the poetic activity in the first place, but to prompt it a teacher needs to understand the gravity of the child's need for symbolic work on his inner life. R. D. Laing[11] quotes a patient in a psychoanalytic discussion group who broke off and said he could not go on: "At best you win an argument. At worst you lose an argument. *I am arguing in order to prove my existence.*" The poet writes "to preserve his existence," at best, and the child creates in this spirit, at best, too—even though he may even seem outwardly offhand or blasé about his work.

The successful starting point for creativity in school will therefore tend to be a situation in which the teacher conveys to young children (by his attitude to poetry and fiction) that he is able to receive and respect significant engagements with experience on an objective "third ground" of imaginative effort with words. I have discussed in detail how such a profound engagement with experience can help a child through a deep personal crisis in *English for the Rejected* and yield beautiful writing which has much to offer others, too, as achieved art. To convey this context for true creativity is easiest with infants, whose life is all art—so easy is their transition from phantasy to reality. But it can be conveyed to adolescents, if the teacher can communicate to his pupils that he is a person they can trust. Is he an adult to whom it is safe to give? "Trust" implies here that the child can give inward revelations without these being abused—that is, he will not be laughed at or greeted with anger or used for the teacher's own emotional ends, though this is a risk we take in promoting creativity.

Given favourable conditions, all children can create and

[11] Ronald D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (New York: Penguin Books, Inc., Pelican A734).

can at times find themselves deeply engaged with troubling inward problems. What are "favourable conditions"? I believe that one of the most important aspects of the teaching institution here is the establishing of an impersonal context in which to explore aspects of experience which perplex children and disturb them. The teacher has to be "there," but English provides an arena. The more inward the *agon*, the more exciting the poetry will be and the greater the satisfactions children will find in entertaining others and in gaining praise from teacher and classmates. The greater the triumph over experience has been, the more satisfying will be the control and order of the language and the greater the contribution to "practical" literacy. Here it will be seen that in giving expression the greatest possible "audience" is most important; it reinforces the objectivity and helps convey that our inner problems are universal—therefore less hard to bear than if we had to bear them alone. (Of course there are occasions when a child's work should not be made "public," but is a confidence between himself and the teacher.)

Here is the clue to the link between creativity and literature. From his experience of language-art the child can be led to discover how other greater and finer adult minds have tackled the same inward problems as torment him and as he has tried to solve. Creative activity can thus become a gateway to the richness of civilisation which the teacher draws from the body of English poetry, as opportunity arises, to find immediately relevant examples to nourish the inward progress of each pupil as he strives towards insight. Such an approach to linking such work (creativity and literature) requires very good training and resourcefulness. It can only work where conditions make it possible—a flexible timetable, small classes, good book supply, adequate free periods, and teachers who are not overworked.

Teachers will find, I believe, that certain poets and writers are more relevant than others to what children are doing in their own poetry. So perhaps this implies a revision of English syllabuses (both in school and teacher training). May-

be certain of the more direct and simple poets—Clare, Crabbe, Blake (in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*), Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, the poems of Po Chu-I (translated by Arthur Waley), folksongs—will be more valuable in contributing to struggles in which the child is already engaged by symbolism, while others which are more complex and remote, such as Milton or the more "Miltonic" work of poets like Wordsworth, Arnold, and Tennyson, should perhaps be left for later self-discovery. A similar revaluation needs to be made of prose (Twain and Lawrence perhaps rather than Poe or the belletrists).

Certainly it is important to cherish naivety. Too much of the poetry given to secondary school children seems to me too academic, and now there is a fashion for false modernity: the essential need for deep but sensitive symbolism must be borne in mind.

But again, what poetry or fiction to choose for his own pupils in school to prompt creative work can only be known adequately by a teacher who has studied the nature of children and their inward problems and who knows his English literature extremely well. For good creative work can only be spontaneous, and the teacher works best when he works with opportunities as they arise. Why children decide to take *hate* one week and *flowers* the next as themes is unpredictable, but it is necessary to important dynamics of their exploration of life for them to do so. The creative teacher must follow, enlarge, and deepen, not seek to dictate or control. But overall, he must have a long-term aim, which is act one of not merely promoting "self-expression," but of establishing links between the civilisation which is growing in each child with the inheritance of civilisation on the shelves of libraries and in the English tongue itself.

One last important point: since creativity is an uncertain and often disturbing activity, it can only be done in a school in which there is courageous and liberal-minded approval of its value and worth; there are important social problems here which I can only hint at. Is our society yet capable of tolerating the open sympathy creativity demands?

## SUMMARY

1. Creativity is not simply a minor aspect of English, but its whole basis, as our literacy is bound up with our capacities to deal with our whole experience.
2. Practical capacities with language depend upon our whole "creative living," and not least on our capacities for work by symbolism on our inner life, to maintain an identity.
3. The inner life underlies all our doings, and education is an intuitive natural process by which the child makes use of the adult for his own purposes, finding order in his inward life while he learns at the same time to deal with the outer world.
4. Because of this the only way to develop creativity in English in school is to train teachers to use their natural gifts in the right way, with understanding of what they are doing.
5. Where English is concerned this means they must (1) become aware of children's inner problems and how they symbolise them, (2) know their literature well *as art*—in terms of its symbolic meaning, and (3) experience creative exploration themselves.
6. The teacher's essential problem is to know when children are being sincere and "real"—involved—in their writing. These things can best be learnt by responding to literature, by experiencing creativity, and by discussing children's work and literature with others.
7. In practical terms creativity requires a free and informal timetable in which the teacher can use longish periods of one to one and a half hours as he wishes. It also requires:
    1. small classes (12-25)
    2. an informal setting in the classroom
    3. good discipline
    4. tolerant authorities
    5. special equipment and opportunities for work to be "published."

8. Creative work reveals the natural exploring energy of children and the themes they need to pursue for their own purposes at each particular stage. This is of incalculable value to the teacher who can then draw on relevant material from literature to enrich a child's insights from distinguished minds from the past and in the world at large. It gives a new impetus to the reexamination of English literature, for the purposes of training literacy.[12]

## Appendix A

### *Books on Creative Writing and on the Nature of Children and Their Inward Developments*

| | |
|---|---|
| *The Education of the Poetic Spirit* | Marjorie Hourd |
| *Coming into Their Own* | Marjorie Hourd |
| *The Keen Edge* | Jack Beckett |
| *Let the Children Write* | Margaret Langdon |
| *The Excitement of Writing* | A. B. Clegg, editor |
| *An Experiment in Education* | Sybil Marshall |
| *Young Writers Young Readers* | Boris Ford, editor |
| *The Children We Teach* | Susan Isaacs |
| *English for Maturity* | David Holbrook |
| *English for the Rejected* | David Holbrook |
| *The Secret Places* | David Holbrook |
| *The Exploring Mind* | David Holbrook |
| *Children's Writing* | David Holbrook |
| *On Not Being Able to Paint* | Marion Milner |
| *Feeling and Perception in Young Children* | Len Chaloner |
| *The Child and the Family* | D. W. Winnicott |
| *The Child and the Outside World* | D. W. Winnicott |

[12]Here it is important to emphasise that "reexamination" need not mean jettisoning the past! A student who knows *Catcher in the Rye* but not *Huckleberry Finn* would have suffered the wrong kind of revolution!

| | |
|---|---|
| *The Family and Individual Development* | D. W. Winnicott |
| *Our Adult World and Its Roots in Infancy* | Melanie Klein |

Studies of children's nursery rhymes and games I am sure are relevant:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Children's Games* | David Holbrook |
| *The Lullaby Book* | Leslie Daiken |
| *Games and Songs of American Children* | William Wells Newell |
| *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* | Iona and Peter Opie |
| *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book* | Iona and Peter Opie |

## Appendix B

### *Equipment and Practical Points*

Creative work requires much more freedom of timetable and of room arrangement than formal work. No one can be expected to get down to creative work in under an hour. While discipline must be firmer than ever to impel the kind of attentive, silent self-exploration (such as an author exerts in his study), children need to be able to turn from one activity to another easily—from writing to painting or to browsing in books—or even to sit vacantly staring into space. They must also be able to approach the teacher with their individual problems easily.

I'd suggest a room informally arranged with tables and chairs. Equipment: paper and painting materials, easels if possible. A tape recorder, gramophone, and "studio" equipment. Furniture that can be cleared for mime or free drama work, and rostra for this. Typewriter and duplicator. A cupboard of properties and a box of odd items of clothes for simple costume effects. Children to have loose-leaf folders to hold their creative writing (illustrated if they wish).

First exercises will be formal and taken as a class—"limbering up" exercises such as the following:

1. Writing down free associations of words.
2. Writing down responses to pieces of music, pictures, sounds. (For a list of useful music see *The Secret Places*.)
3. Writing a "poem like this one" or a story "like this."
4. Painting a picture from a poem.
5. Miming a poem, piece of music, or a story.
6. Devising a synopsis for a play.
7. Giving a description of a person (as for the police, etc.). Some of these exercises may be tape recorded and played to other classes.

Beyond such exercises children should begin to pursue their own creative tastes. One will want to write dialogue, one "a novel," some short stories, others to paint pictures or collaborate over a play script. Such work is untidy, but a good teacher will know how to control it and will return from time to time to an exercise for all the class at once (e.g., writing a ballad) so that matters of technique may be discussed as a group. Of course, from time to time, individual pieces will also be discussed and criticised in class.

Examples to prompt creative work should, I am sure, preferably be creatively symbolic in themselves—that is, pieces of music, poems, paintings, stories, rather than real objects or accounts of real events. Actual objects, photographs, news items are less likely to prompt "involved" creativity, because they have too little unconscious content and symbolic quality. Two sources of useful initiative are (1) good examples of children's own writing which often prompts the best kind of imitation, because of its unconscious and involved content, (2) imaginary family situations—Dad is having a row with Mum, etc. Children are intensely caught up in family life. (One perpetual success with girls who run out of inspiration is to tell them that they have found a baby wrapped up in newspaper on the step that morning—what do they do with it? I have never known this to fail!)

Unless they are obviously private or painful all successful pieces should be given an audience—as by (1) dupli-

cating copies, (2) reading aloud to the class, (3) dramatising a script, (4) recording and playing back on tape, (5) publishing class or school magazines, (6) pinning on the wall, (7) performing live before other classes or schools. The natural desire to thrill, entertain, and share feelings with others is important here. Work "published" should have all its spelling and punctuation corrected—and this provides many opportunities for these drills. Expression needs to be made clear, but "respectable" grammar need not be imposed where the vernacular is lively and impressive in its own right.

*Marking:* Except in correcting for "punctuation," creative work should not be marked throughout for minor errors, nor is there much point in giving it a percentage or grade (unless school records demand it!). What the child *does* want to know is whether the teacher has read his piece and if he liked it: was it a good "love-offering"? Even if it wasn't very good as a piece of writing, the effort has been commendable and the gift must be accepted: all effort should be praised, for in creativity we all identify with our "inner contents," and to be cribbed (as by reviewers!) gives us a good deal of pain. Of course, laziness or slovenliness needs attention here as much as anywhere. Perhaps the necessary atmosphere is best conveyed by the words of a little girl of eight I heard playing school with my children:

**Sit down!**
**Shup up!**
**Now we'll have some free activity!**

*Timetable:* I'd say two periods a week of 1½ hours for free writing and drama would be ideal. But one hour a week is surely a minimum: and this should be a disciplined hour of concentrated attention to original imaginative composition.

*Procedure:* Some practical points may perhaps usefully be made here:

1. No one can create all the time: periods of reading, being read to, being entertained, taking in from

literature and the creative output of others are most important.

2. While children do create to order, they may flop badly at times; individuals may dry up or fail. These failures are important, and *they must be endured.* (How much does any author burn or throw away!) It won't do to idealise creative capacity: often one draws a blank!
3. Children should be asked to give their permission before their work is read out or "published."

*A warning:* Inevitably, creative work reveals personal weaknesses and often severe personal problems. These are the penalty of approaching our work in a humane way: great tact will often be required. But what the teacher must professionally insist upon is that (as psychoanalytical realism indicates) if problems emerge *they have probably been there since infancy* and were there before the English teacher arrived on the scene! Creativity has merely made it possible to see them or impossible for the school community to go on disguising or denying them! In my experience teachers are sometimes accused of *causing* difficulties by promoting creative work (e.g., shoplifting, sexual misconduct, etc.). Such attitudes seem to me something of a manifestation of fear and envy of creative work, of whole living processes, and of children (on the part of some). But there are social problems here—can society tolerate the kind of open sympathy creativity demands? I think it is important to insist that disciplined creative work can do no harm—and can only provide an opportunity for a child to try to make sense of his life (not least when at times it lies in ruins) in an objective context.

There is one possible complexity, that sometimes there may be a strong clash of personality between teacher and child at the unconscious level. But this is a risk we take in having to do with other people at all.

# A SHORT DIALOGUE ON SOME ASPECTS OF THAT WHICH WE CALL CREATIVE ENGLISH

Geoffrey Summerfield

**Q. Raymond Williams, in *The Long Revolution*, writes: "No word in English carries a more consistently positive reference than *creative*, and obviously we should be glad of this, when we think of the values it seeks to express and the activities it offers to describe." Do you find the word useful, when you come to express *your* values and describe *your* pupils' activities?**

**A. I certainly use it, often, so it *must* be useful to me, and yet I find myself very much in sympathy with Williams when, in the same context, he goes on to say this: "Yet, clearly, the very width of the reference involves not only difficulties of meaning, but also, through habit, a kind of unthinking repetition which at times makes the word seem useless." You'll observe that he has isolated two difficulties of meaning, and they're two aspects of the same question, namely, the difficulties and confusions that arise through our use, or misuse, of the word.**

**Q. If the word is hedged about with such difficulties, why do you go on using it? Wouldn't it be better to drop it altogether?**

**A. No, I prefer to keep it, not because I'm not prepared to find a more precise term, but because I want to keep its**

force; that is, I want the "consistently positive reference" that Williams indicates. In my own experience, as a teacher, the word can be used to refer to certain kinds of activity that are both distinctive and desirable, activities that I, as a teacher, want to promote. And I think that over the next few years, the word can be usefully rehabilitated, if we are willing to make the necessary effort.

Q. But surely, by insisting on the word, as it tends to be used at the moment, you range yourselves with those who march under a rather gaudy and sloppy banner?

A. Yes, one needs to make discriminations, if only to dissociate oneself from those ostensible allies whose policies and programmes one feels uneasy about. And I'd be the first to agree that the word—*creative*—has too often been reduced to a mere political gesture, to a slogan, whose purpose is to show the world that we are on the side of the angels—the progressive angels—and to show that we "care."

Q. Are there no conservative angels?

A. Not in my experience, but maybe they travel under the guise of prophets of doom; no, it's the progressive angels that bother me. Jacques Barzun had a good swipe at them in *The House of Intellect:* they stand or fall for all that is ill-formulated, permissive, and antiacademic, learning-made-easy, and the abandonment of standards.

Q. Standards? Such as?

A. Decent standards in matters of spelling, syntax, legibility, speech—the accomplishments and skills that society, in the guise of employers and the professions, expects of us.

Q. *Decent* is an odd word in that context. Surely it would be more appropriate in a discussion of morality or ethics?

A. Agreed! But the very phrase *decent standards* serves to pinpoint one of the most interesting aspects of the situation. Much discussion of literacy and of literate competence takes on this moral bias: *discipline, control,* and *reliability* are, similarly, terms that have shifted from the moral philosophy arena into the layman's discussion

of learning and linguistic performance. To spell correctly is a sign of grace: it signifies that you are not only able but also willing, even anxious, to toe the line that your elders and betters have laid down, and to "work hard" in order to refine and extend your skills is a token of moral virtue.

Q. But isn't it?

A. Well, one might raise the question of motives! But, more usefully, one should take a long cool look at this notion of "hard work." Historically, many of our attitudes toward "hard work" are rooted in the protestant ethic, in the assumption that if we submit ourselves to the rigour, the discipline of mental strenuousness, we are thereby one stage nearer the kingdom of heaven. (H. L. Mencken was remarking this forty years ago as an important strand in northeastern America). Yet when we observe the activity of a good scholar or a good craftsman or a good artist, what we see is something rather different from and rather more complicated than mere submission to discipline. What we see, as far as the spectator can understand it from the outside, is a state of mind which includes absorption, curiosity, persistence, inquisitiveness, tentativeness, experimentation, and exhaustion. When a scholar sits up all night pursuing an idea, we do not immediately think of saying "There is a *good man*," but rather, "There is a keen, even fanatical, scholar." The former "good man" proposition is much more a moral evaluation than the latter.

Q. That is all very well, but what of the external demands made upon us by "society"—by parents, employers, superiors, and so on? The scholar or artist is, after all, a relatively rare bird. Most of us have to work in a less rarefied atmosphere, in a world where other people, schedules, programmes, organisations are making demands of us that we ought, in all conscience, to meet. And to do so, we may well have to submit ourselves to a discipline and deny ourselves immediate pleasures in order to meet our responsibilities.

A. Agreed. The good scholar and the good artist are admittedly unusual in the degree to which there is an identification of what they *want* to do with what they *need* to do; the peculiar boredom of our civilisation, its distinctive horror, too, is in the fact that far too many of us are occupied in ways that engage neither our hearts nor our minds. But what I wish to stress is this: that the notion that uncongenial, hard work is "good for us" seems to me an unpleasant and demoralising heresy. You may well be tempted to reach for a case to prove me wrong.

Q. May I do just that? What of the pianist who denies himself the pleasure of a morning walk in order to practise his scales for a couple of hours?

A. I was afraid that you would drag in the pianist! He is always being hauled in to demonstrate that the hard grind is the high road to accomplishment and mastery. He's a dangerous snare, because, to mix my metaphors, he is hydra-headed; for every masterly pianist, for whom such work is an intelligently accepted discipline yielding its due reward of flexibility and dexterity, there are tens of thousands for whom the toil and weariness outweigh the returns, and who therefore give up. The motivation that keeps the good pianist at the job is a positive one, not a negative one; he can feel himself increasing in dexterity, and he is also able positively to enjoy the fascination of what's difficult. One further point about this distinction: the master *chooses* to sit at the keyboard and forego the park, whereas the tyro is usually pressed, impressed, oppressed, depressed, or suppressed into sitting there, because his parents insist. The pianist-argument conceals many another confusion, but let's just settle for the masochist one: the notion, that is, that we must inflict on ourselves boredom, tedium, self-denial, weariness, uncongenial difficulty, even pain, in order to achieve anything at all. The roots of this assumption may well be found in Genesis 3:19 and, more recently, in the economic applications of the protestant ethic, but wherever the roots are to be found, the assumption seems to

pervade our culture. Only by looking at other patterns of culture, as for example Ruth Benedict has, can we begin to free ourselves from the unquestioned legacies of moral precedents.

Q. Fine! But the world isn't a playground; it's business, commerce, technology, industry, and an honest day's work. Isn't it the business of education to equip us to operate efficiently in the world?

A. History, insofar as it provides an answer, would appear to answer "Yes." The English grammar school curriculum derives from the medieval Seven Liberal Arts; the word *liberal* might appear to suggest something non-vocational, and yet this curriculum of trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and quadrivium (music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy) was quite clearly vocational: it was a proper education for priests and prepared them for the efficient performance of their duties. Similarly, the curriculum of the English elementary school between 1870 and 1940 was, in large part, designed to prepare young people for the more elementary and laborious clerical and accounting chores of the prosperous business house. In a broader sense, it seems to an Englishman that much American education has been devised to persuade young Americans that they live in a truly democratic society, just as, in a similarly broad sense, the schools of the British Empire were so ordered as to inculcate loyalty to God, King, and Country. Reinforcing the informing assumptions of the home, the schools have succeeded in producing remarkably conformist young people, and there seems to be a subtle and complex, but nonetheless marked, connection between acceptable performance of clerical and bookkeeping skills on the one hand and social conformity on the other. Look at the textbooks in English language of the past thirty years, and what you tend to find is work which is, on the whole, dry and unrewarding, but which is assumed to foster socially requisite skills. It is only of late that we have begun to discover that their claims are unfounded,

that they do not merely fail to foster such skills, but even stunt the extension and refinement of linguistic control.

Q. Which, then, came first? The failure of the textbook or the emergence of "creative" English? Did the latter merely serve to fill the yawning void produced by the disappearance of the textbook?

A. The textbook is still with us, and most of us use it at some time or other, but my guess is that the growth of "creative" English was partly characterized by an increasing scepticism about the textbook and about the kinds of activities that it stood for, both for the pupil and also for the teacher. Its worst fault, I think, is that at worst it is so contrived as to supplant the teacher and is based on a false relationship—a quasi-familiar relationship between the voice of the textbook writer and the ear of the pupil. It's a false relationship, because the pupil can't answer back!

Q. But what are these activities that you so mistrust?

A. Textbook exercises tend to be disconnected, fragmentary, arbitrary, and abstract.

Q. And what does that all mean?

A. A more useful way to describe them is to begin by saying what they are not. And, to do this, go away and observe the way in which a child's use of language develops from birth to, say, the age of five. He learns to use language by using it; he uses it because it helps him to meet his needs, to master his environment, and to satisfy his desires. Or observe a group of adolescents arguing about their rights or their duties: their conversation is partly self-assertion, partly self-exhibition, partly exploration, partly refutation, partly sharing and comparing. By the time we reach adolescence, most of our use of language is to be found in conversation, both with ourselves and with others, and it is through such conversation that we extend and enrich our capacity for further conversation.

Q. But how far can this business of conversation be pushed? What about reading? Doesn't that represent an important private field for linguistic growth?

A. For some people I think it is, but I would hesitate to press its claim too hard. At the moment, of course, we are reacting against an undue preoccupation with reading and writing such as tended to drive talking and listening out into the cold, as mere time-wasting or soft option. But "conversation" *is* important, both in itself and as an image of human society. Michael Oakeshott has memorably described this particular aspect:

> This, I believe, is the appropriate image of human intercourse—appropriate because it recognises the qualities, the diversities, and the proper relationships of human utterances. As civilised human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an enquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves. Of course there is argument and enquiry and information, but wherever these are profitable they are to be recognised as passages in this conversation, and perhaps they are not the most captivating of the passages. It is the ability to participate in this conversation, and not the ability to reason cogently, to make discoveries about the world, or to contrive a better world, which distinguishes the human being from the animal and the civilised man from the barbarian. Indeed, it seems not improbable that it was the engagement in this conversation (where talk is without a conclusion) that gave us our present appearance, man being descended from a race of apes who sat in talk so long and so late that they wore out their tails. Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognise the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation.

Q. Michael Oakeshott amuses and captivates by the delicacy

of his humour and the elegance of his manner, and one can see the relevance of his metaphor of conversation to our thinking about man as a social animal, but what of his relevance to the classroom?

A. In the paragraph before the one quoted above, he presents some of the characteristics of conversation as he wants us to understand his use of the term; these are so relevant to the classroom that I shall take the liberty of quoting him again. I don't apologise for quoting him verbatim: why, after all, should I clumsily parody what he says so well in his own inimitable way?

> In a conversation the participants are not engaged in an enquiry or a debate; there is no "truth" to be discovered, no proposition to be proved, no conclusion sought. They are not concerned to inform, to persuade, or to refute one another, and therefore the cogency of their utterances does not depend upon their all speaking in the same idiom; they may differ without disagreeing. Of course, a conversation may have passages of argument and a speaker is not forbidden to be demonstrative; but reasoning is neither sovereign nor alone, and the conversation itself does not compose an argument. A girl, in order to escape a conclusion, may utter what appears to be an outrageously irrelevant remark, but what in fact she is doing is turning an argument she finds tiresome into a conversation she is more at home in. In conversation, "facts" appear only to be resolved once more into the possibilities from which they were made; "certainties" are shown to be combustible, not by being brought in contact with other "certainties" or with doubts, but by being kindled by the presence of ideas of another order; approximations are revealed between notions normally remote from one another. Thoughts of different species take wing and play round one another, responding to each other's movements and provoking one another to fresh exertions. Nobody asks where they have come from or on what authority they are present; nobody cares

> what will become of them when they have played their part. There is no symposiarch or arbiter; not even a doorkeeper to examine credentials. Every errant is taken at its face-value and everything is permitted which can get itself accepted into the flow of speculation. And voices which speak in conversation do not compose a hierarchy. Conversation is not an enterprise designed to yield an extrinsic profit, a contest where a winner gets a prize, nor is it an activity of exegesis; it is an unrehearsed intellectual adventure. It is with conversation as with gambling, its significance lies neither in winning nor in losing, but in wagering. Properly speaking, it is impossible in the absence of a diversity of voices: in it different universes of discourse meet, acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another.

Q. That, again, is very fine,[10] but one must enter some objections. In the first place it assumes a degree of equality between the participants—not necessarily in intellectual, but rather in "status" terms—that we can't expect to find in the classroom. In the second place, your use of it ignores the teacher's duty of providing instruction.

A. To take up your first point: the tone of conversation that Oakeshott envisages is admittedly quite unlike the tone of many of the teacher-pupil exchanges that we ourselves have experienced. But this does not mean that we should not dare to change our style in the direction of the one that he proposes; indeed, I suggest that our schools would be appreciably more civilised and civilising if we could establish such conversation as the habitual and accepted mode of discourse. The problem may well be one of the teacher's own security and self-control: I confess that whenever I feel my class-control threatened, I resort to a dominating imperative tone that effectively kills conversation, and, again, any move towards conver-

[10] It is Professor Oakeshott's essay in R. S. Peters' symposium, *The Concept of Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

sation in Oakeshott's sense will involve a carefully graduated and judiciously modulated transition. It may be *difficult* to achieve, but this is no good reason for not trying. Your second point raises the question of the role of the teacher in such a conversation. . . .

Q. Precisely! Isn't this abject abdication—to sit around, *making conversation?*

A. Have you tried it? Seriously? It's not a job for the lazy teacher. The lazy teacher—myself when remiss—will talk aimlessly and idly for an hour at a time, but I've never known a lazy teacher engage in the kind of conversation that Oakeshott describes—participation in such conversation involves attentiveness and self-control, if nothing more. When I'm lazy, I'm too lazy to *listen* and *respond* to other people, especially incoherent pupils struggling towards articulacy.

But let us turn to your point about "providing instruction," the matter on which Barzun finds us guilty of mass defection. To take it at a fairly banal level, the notion of instruction assumes the existence of an instructor, of the instructed, and of something that is transmitted.[14] The term is felt to be especially appropriate when a skill, such as swimming, is involved. In such a situation, the instruction normally proceeds alongside both demonstration by the instructor and also practise of the skill by the instructed: the instructor both demonstrates and explains what he is demonstrating; the instructed practise, their practise being guided and modified by the instructor. (And the most effective instruction is given individually.) There is of course a place in English for such instruction, but if we have learnt anything in the past twenty years, it is that the wind of instruction needs to be tempered to the shorn lamb of the pupil, and many of the hitherto time-honoured items of instruction have fallen by the wayside because they were unrelated to the pupil's actual needs. Another way of putting this is to say

[14] There are some useful analyses of "instruction" and of "skill" in R. S. Peters, *op. cit.*

that instructing a class is less effective than individual instruction because each pupil needs to be instructed in different aspects of the subject.

But I don't myself see "creative" English as something that had to come merely to fill the void which came with the disappearance of formal instruction in language and rhetoric. My own reading of the situation is rather that bright coinage drove out dull and defaced coinage.

Q. Your metaphor is, you must agree, tendentious. Can you be more specific?

A. Let's take the case of the essay. I don't frankly know much about the history of the essay; in literature, yes, one can trace some sort of lineage, although even there it interweaves with other forms of discourse in such things as the sermon and journalistic prose. But in the context of teaching and examining English, one sees it emerge as a dominant form in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly in connection with the growth of the civil service examinations. Such things have a habit of filtering down, and the essay was no exception; before long it was the staple of all grammar school English work, and eventually it bedded down in the primary schools. (I recall writing essays at the age of nine or ten and so continuing until I graduated, but I've not written any since graduating.) So we had this bizarre situation: that a formal, fairly impersonal exercise in a neo-Aristotelian rhetoric, on matters of no personal immediate concern, became the standard and often the *only* mode of writing in an extended way. What was good enough for James Mill in the India Office or the editor of *The Times* was also appropriate to the child of nine or ten: one's apprenticeship for the civil service began early. The unnatural, the formal, the voice of commerce or of jargon—specifically, the use of the impersonal third person mode, the avoidance of the personally particular or the intimately familiar both in voice and in referent—such were the norms: they still persist. As Edward

Blishen recently put it, it was a world in which you didn't write *didn't* because *didn't* was an expression of your speaking voice, and you had to learn that your writing voice didn't—did not—record the rhythms and inflections of your speaking voice, but had to be much more formal, proper, austere, and unrelievedly on its best behaviour, standing at attention all the time.

Perhaps we are just a little wiser today and are more willing to accept the pupil's own voice speaking of that which he knows best, transmitting valued experience and "paying homage to his sacred objects,"[12] like this:

*The person I admire*

The person I admire is about five feet eleven inches tall and is a very well built man in strength and physique, he's got very broad shoulders and his arms are long and wide and end with strong hands with fingers that can hold a tight grip like a vice. These are the hands of a labourer, the man I admire is a labourer and a hard working one too.

He is nearly always happy but when you catch him in a temper or do something drastically wrong and he thinks it fit you should be punished then he punnishes you. He does not like punnishing children for he is a kind man at heart. But what must be done must be done. When he punishes anybody he uses the flat of his hand across the back off the head for he thinks that it is not as embarrassing as putting you over his knee a spanking your behind.

This man I admire is just about all the time smart but for when he goes to work he puts his overalls on and goes up the street to my friend's father's house and goes to work. Because the man gives him a lift in his "mini." He has an old hat for when he is in the garden as well as some old jeans a pair of hob-nail boots and an old cardigan with a hole under the right armpit. But if it is a warm day he will just do the garden in his jeans and his boots and nothing but a string vest on his chest and back.

In his garden, he has got six rows of carnations at the bottom on one half of the garden for their is a path going down the centre. And on the rest of this half there is usually in the summer, Potatoes and on the other side of which half is a lawn and on the rest is a mixture of Gladiollas and roses which he grows for his wife. He goes down to the Clarence club on Sunday meal times (from twelve till two).

[12] See W. H. Auden, *Making, Knowing, and Judging*.

**But He doesn't have more than four pints.**
**As you may have guessed**
**this man is no other than my father.**

Do you like that? It's the work of Eric, a thirteen-year-old boy in a nonselective secondary school in York, England.

Q. Yes, I do, though I'm not quite sure why. Probably because it's distinctive and personal, because he is writing about what he really knows. But there are many things that I can't *judge*, because I don't know the writer and his previous work.

A. Agreed. As Sartre has said, what we need is a better biography. As far as growth of skill and competence is concerned, one can only assess it in terms of his writing up to that date. Even marking it and placing it in a class-order would be, in many ways, nonsensical, since it is *his* use of language that concerns us, rather than his superiority over x or y. But what of the solecisms—*two* for *too*, *elleven* for *eleven*, and *their* for *there*? What would you do about those?

Q. Will they, perhaps, look after themselves? Or is that wishful thinking?

A. Again, I think this is a matter of biography. When one knows a pupil's work over a year or two, then one can slowly build up a sense of the expectations that it is fair, just, and reasonable to have of him. But again, it's a matter of context, of what we are asking him to attend to. Knowing Eric, who is a lively, vivacious, and reliable boy, I would work on the assumption that such aberrations will disappear of themselves: there's certainly no serious deficiency in his "apparatus." As far as his sense of form or "shaping" is concerned, this has grown through a judicious mixture of assimilation from extensive and pleasurable reading and of eliciting from him a rudimentary feeling for paragraph form, making explicit, at the appropriate stage, what he had already assimilated over and over again. But the important qualities are surely the vividness and the feeling for the telling detail:

his eyes and ears, one feels, are alive and responsive.

Q. I take it then that your point might be this: that Eric has not been forced into a formalistic preoccupation with structure or syntax, but that he has been encouraged to write with his "eyes open." In more general terms, what sort of contribution do the major writers have to offer the ordinary teacher in this matter of "creative writing"?

A. My own view is that many writers can offer us clues or insights in this matter, but that if we go to them in search of a systematized, orderly, reach-me-down bag of tricks, then we shall be disappointed. One picks up hints here and there, although it's a pity that so little effort has so far been made to draw them together and to point up their relevance. And I think that the relevance is the thing that needs to be insisted on, since our academically induced sense of hierarchies is not such as to encourage us to connect, say, Coleridge or T. S. Eliot with this or that boy or girl chewing a pen in the back row of the downtown slum school. But it's no good pontificating about the relevance—it's something that one has to feel for oneself, in the particular instance. And in *feeling* such relevance, one finds the defeatist head-shaking of the weary and the disenchanted—"You can't expect to get much from *these* kids"—properly placed, as mere self-justifying and self-defensive prejudice.

But to the point. The act of creation, the making, remains, for me, a mystery. At one extreme, we have Robert Graves' personal and idiosyncratic attachment to the Muse; at another, the cool and laconic reflections of Sir Peter Medawar. Medawar, like Graves and Oakeshott, writes prose like an angel, and for the elegance and sharp clean edge of his style (as well as for his exchange with Arthur Koestler à propos of *The Act of Creation*), his recent book, *The Art of the Soluble* (London: Methuen, 1967) is a delight; but for our present purposes, all that he is prepared to say in his essay, "Hypothesis and Imagination," is this:

> It has often been suggested that the act of creation is the same in the arts as it is in science: certainly "having an idea"—the formulation of a hypothesis—resembles other forms of inspirational activity in the circumstances that favour it, the suddenness with which it comes about, the wholeness of the conception it embodies, and the fact that the mental events which lead up to it happen below the surface of the mind. (pp. 154-155)

And the kinds of hints that one picks up from the practising writer are usually not directed so much at the making, as at the state of being, of awareness, that provided the immediate or preliminary context for the act: to put it another way, they are about the provocations, the perceptions, the conditions which give rise to the making. (William Stafford's poem, "Ice-Fishing," is, among other things, a marvellous emblem of these.)

Let's look at some instances of this, bearing in mind the crucial proviso that each man speaks for himself and not for others. Keats' letters contain numerous aperçus which are worth reflecting on: let us take just four of them from the remarkable letters of late 1817 and 1818.

> nothing startles me beyond the Moment. The setting Sun will always set me to rights—or if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existince and pick about the Gravel (Letter to Bailey, 22 November)

> several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in literature . . . I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason . . . (Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21 December)

> As Tradesmen say every thing is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer . . . (Letter to Bailey, 13 March)

> As to the poetical Character itself . . . it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous

> philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet . . . is continually infor[ming] and filling some other Body . . . When I am in a room with People . . . the identity of every one in the room begins so to press upon me that I am in a very little time an[ni]hilated. (Letter to Woodhouse, 27 October)

I would interpose here what seems to me an interesting point: if, as teachers, we take Keats' "camelion" metaphor seriously, then we need to extend the range of experience that we are prepared to admit as acceptable in the work of our pupils, especially in their written work.

The distinctive features of this Keatsian condition seem to be the relegation of the rational analytic intellect, a state of unquestioning uncertainty, and the abeyance of the insisting self, conscious of itself. The conjunction of such a trinity might well appear to be oddly negative, but by way of complement to the ostensibly passive vacuity, we find a condition of extended awareness, of keener receptiveness, and of an ability or readiness to become other than one's self. To borrow a word from the junky, this state would appear to be psychedelic, without benefit of junk. Self-forgetfulness appears to be a necessary condition for the extension of awareness.

Q. I'll overlook the fact that Medawar reminds us that "the idea of naive or innocent observation is philosophers' make-believe" (*Op. cit.*, p. 132), and concede that these may well represent some of the more congenial conditions for responding to the stimulus of lively awareness, but what of motivation? Why does the individual then go on to make his art? What is it that induces him to bother? Why doesn't he—when the excitement, or whatever, is dissipated—just turn back to the telly or to counting coffee spoons?

A. Auden's answer is that he wants "to pay homage to a sacred object," while Raymond Williams says that he wishes to transmit a valued experience. For Williams, art is essentially an exceptionally well-ordered form of com-

munication, a means of sharing. Insofar as I've tried to write fiction and poetry, I'd agree with Williams' stress on communication. Initially there is the obsession—the thing has you hooked, and you have to work your way free. And you work your way free by externalizing, by getting it "out there," where you can, if the relationship is good, share it with others. In effect you say, "This is how it was" or "This is how it seemed to me."

Q. Could it be, basically, a solipsistic activity, a search, perhaps exclusively, for your self?

A. Perhaps the best way to answer that question is to quote from Reed Whittemore's essay on Churchill where he writes of those he labels "writer-thinkers": "that is, men who think by writing, who discover where they stand and what they believe and how they propose to act by putting themselves down on paper, looking at themselves there, and perhaps erasing themselves out, revising themselves, rewriting themselves interminably . . . . . They know with confidence only what they have expressed, and having expressed it they enjoy nothing more than rereading their achievement."[10] Which may be another way of saying that without the exercise of imagination we not only fail to know others but also fail to know ourselves. My own experience, as teacher, suggests that we err when we rush our adolescent pupils into "understanding" others before we have allowed them plenty of opportunity to put themselves down on paper.

Q. Which brings us to the role of the teacher. Assuming that only the reactionaries are still fighting a rearguard action to preserve the teacher as instructor, how then would you formulate his role? Is he now reduced to the status of amateur psychotherapist, running a confessional?

A. If your last question is rhetorical, I take your point. It may well be that we stand in danger of running hothouses for articulate introverts! Let us, however, begin at the

[10] "Churchill and the Limitations of Myth," in *The Boy from Iowa* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962).

beginning. You'll recall that Dr. Blanton, in *Reading and Son*, regretted the fact that children weren't adults and set out to put this to rights with unfortunate consequences to his pupils. Our first need, I suppose, is to develop a sense of appropriateness or, to use an old-fashioned Aristotelian term, *decorum*: to develop, that is, a proper sense of what can be expected of our pupils, who will be disinhibited if our expectations are mean, and hurried or hurried if our expectations are premature.

Assuming that we have the sense to develop such a sense, and the autonomy to resist extraneous pressures from those who merely want to see our pupils, then we ourselves need to establish, confirm, and extend our sense of the possibilities—the possibilities of both our pupils and of the subject, and that is an arbitrary distinction, since they are two sides of the same coin. Take this case:

War

> Was not this timely and dying hell in agony and torment, the young man that was aged in seconds? Did he not long for a gun and a voice of command, the exploding shells, the rattling machine guns, the screams and cries of dying men? Charge! ringing through his head; fire! shouting, falling men. The glory of mud and blood mingling together, fighting and dying for his country.
>
> But now, lying face down in his glorious mud, failing, smiling and hating it, he cried to die, to end it all. But no, life cannot end that easily here. For dying for your country is not new words to stiffen you with pride, but pain and sorrow, agony and sweat, tears and blood mixed with death and madness. There's no end, not now or ever, for his last gasp of breath will be heaved and forced in pain, his sides will ache, his throat will burn, his eyes will blurr and his blood will drain from his pale and distorted body drop by drop. Blood will fall over his face and from his mouth. He knows he is dying, he knows there's no hope, he knew it would end this way. He thinks of how he sat with his cheerful mates every minute of every day, watching, waiting. Eyes shots breaking him with fear, the screaming and cries of pain from his dying friend tearing his mind and soul to pieces.
>
> And as his life slowly ticks away, his last breath wrenched from his dying body, he feels no glory nor victory, he thinks not of other dying men or of those still fighting, fighting, fighting, continuously fighting their way through a black cloud of death.

> To stop, or give up fighting, or to gasp a breath, is death. There's no returning, no one will survive. The darkness hangs all round, smothering all hope and with it life. And so he lies there suspended between life and death, he laughs at life for life is death and he cries within himself. He bites his lip till blood bursts from it, a pain stabs within him, his fist clenches. The sound of hopeless battle dies from his ears, he is slipping from this world. He dies not with the call of trumpets ringing in his head, but with the hollow call of death hallooing him on and on. . . . . .

That was written by an average-seeming girl of fifteen. Her classmates were unwilling to believe that she had written it. Yet once they had heard it and read it, they had a newly enlarged sense of what they were capable of: not merely in terms of feeling, of passionate conviction and sensitivity, but in terms of eloquence, of finding the "true voice of feeling," of writing effectively and even powerfully. It's important, of course, to escape from the current myth that "creative English" is simply a matter of getting the pupils to write little poems; such a notion is obviously limiting and, indeed, silly: at worst, it degenerates into a game in which the kids write the sort of half-baked, facile free (licentious?) verse that they know the teacher wants or will tolerate.

**Q. But it's clear that, in the lay mind, "creative English" is associated precisely with such effusions!**

**A. Alas, yes. Yet, in fact, "creative" work is better understood in terms of attitudes to the pupil and to the relationships that are possible for him. The field of creative English is *not* coextensive with written English, especially not with the writing of free verse: unfortunately, recent reports from the front line have tended to rely overmuch on portable and quotable bits of verse that can fit nearly into the context of an essay and that also serve to demonstrate the writer's concern to defend the estate of poetry.**

**Q. Much of it seems oddly remote and irrelevant in a society where many of the most impressive literary talents are working in the theatre or television. Why is it so often *poetry* poetry?**

A. Well, another way of putting it is to say that our present modes are not only over-literary but also narrowly literary. But let's clear up one incidental source of confusion: "creative English," for me, does not exist as a nursery for the cultivation of literary talent; one is not cultivating poets: one is trying to foster the growth of more articulate, more effectively human people. To return to the question of modes: our conception of literature or of verbal art is wildly archaic; as far as the pupil's writing is concerned it comprises, generally, prose-fiction and free verse. This is a ridiculously limited repertoire, when one remembers the existence of such verbal artifacts as copywriting, TV documentary writing, ghost-writing, orators, radio-programme-makers, commentators, journalists, historians, autobiographers, shop assistants, secretaries, civil servants, and so on. But from all these, the individual teacher must select, and the basis of selection must be rational and conscious, not merely a matter of habit. One of the criteria will be some consideration of the uses we make of language in our postschool lives, and another will be a sense of what is possible.

Take the first. Most of us talk much more than we write. We discuss, argue, answer questions, give instructions, offer guidance, and so on in a face-to-face situation. Judging by the evidence of English capabilities, we are ill-prepared to do such things. Oral and aural inefficiency is a major source of irritation and frustration: we listen ineffectively, and we answer approximately or irrelevantly. In any given situation, in a shop for example, such incompetence is due in part to inadequate training in the immediate past, but behind such moments of inadequacy lies a history of oral inanition. Social alertness is not fostered by our teaching methods, because those methods do not themselves involve social relationships, do not draw sufficiently on discussion and conversation in which all feel both free and committed to participate alertly. Involvement in such social situations should occupy an increasing place in the education of the adolescent. I don't

think we need envisage the setting up of false or pretended situations: day-to-day participation in the activities of the school and of the class should be so devised as to ensure that such demands are made in a real and productive way on our pupils.

To take up my second point, about possible media: unless the school is equipped with closed circuit television, there seems little to be gained from writing scripts for television plays or documentaries. But, given a tape recorder, it is possible to write plays and documentaries for radio and to devise the work in such a way that all the talents in the class, however modest or ordinary, can be effectively involved in the job. From the point of view of the English teacher, radio is a peculiarly fruitful medium since, with the exception of music and sound effects, we depend on words—however used—to make our point. I'll return to this later, if I may.

Q. Could we come back to the question of the role of the teacher? This seems to me to be one of the most problematic aspects of "creative English": what is the teacher there for, and what does he see as his duty, other than—presumably—to be creative?

A. May we go back, for a moment, to the early New Orleans jazzmen? I'd like to see them as a model. In the jam combination, each individual feeds his contribution into the concerted effort of the group, and one person orders this in such a way as to achieve coherence and cohesion, but in so ordering, he does not obliterate or inhibit the other individuals: each gives what he is best equipped to give, whatever it may be. And they learn to play jazz by playing it. Unfortunately, our current notions of creative achievement seem to rest on the post-Renaissance and more especially on the Romantic notion of the artist as solitary or isolate. This may well have been reinforced by the assumptions of competitive society—each individual competing against others; certainly the performance of the pupils is often bent in the direction of competitiveness by our habits of giving a rank-order to their achievement.

Whatever the reasons, we tend to assume that creative effort is something for the individual to submit to, in isolation, rather than conceiving ways in which such effort can be fed into a more collaborative enterprise.

As I see it, one of the first jobs for the teacher is to initiate such collaboration, to guide it as much as necessary, to intervene when chaos threatens, to foster a sense of standards—a delicate matter, to point to possibilities, and to elicit contributions. This all sounds terribly abstract, but I'll try to put flesh on the skeleton when we come to discuss particular cases. The sooner we break away from abstractions, the better!

Q. Before we do so, are you suggesting that there is no place for the individual achievement, no opportunity for the pupil to pursue his "craft and sullen art" in isolation?

A. Not at all, but I don't think that a dualistic way of thinking about this is very helpful. If we envisage a spectrum or scale with the whole class at one end and the individual at the other end, then there are numerous variable possibilities between these two extremes. At the private extreme, we have the inner thoughts that the individual is not ready or able to share with others. But all our lives are lived, to a large extent, in relationship; sharing experience, comparing and checking it against others' seems to me valuable; there are many areas of our own emotions and attitudes, in adolescence, that we tend to regard as peculiar to ourselves. To learn, through sharing, that others' experiences are similar is, in itself, a source of reassurance, a liberation from private fears. Hence, in part, the importance, the sheer usefulness, of literature. James Reeves has helpfully defined it in terms of a "neutral area": that is, one can discuss with a class a short story which touches, however indirectly or implicitly, on their concerns, and one can do this in such a way as to clarify and give a provisional order to their experience without actually eliciting or adducing that experience in public. A good example is Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, a book which handles parent-child tensions

with great sensitivity; when one reads this to a class of thirteen-year-olds, their faces register the *Aristotelian* pleasure of recognition. One does not need to drag their own experience into the light of day in order to reinforce the point; they have already taken the point: that this is, in an important sense, *their own* life. That it is literally someone else's experience leaves them free to hold it at arm's length if they need to do so.

And this relates to the emotional and social tone of the situation within which one encourages them to write of their own experience. It should not be that of the confessional, since the "confession" depends on an absolutely private and confidential relationship. But, ideally, one's pupils should be as honest, as disconcertingly honest, as they *need* to be, and such honesty presupposes, of course, the kind of relationship that is represented by Oakeshott's description of conversation.[17] The range of experience received into such conversation grows more extensive in adolescence, and the conversation is one's best way of *keeping in touch* with one's pupils at that stage in their growth when they are turning away and inward—when, in short, communication so often threatens to break down.

Q. But when they come to write about their own experience, what is it that they write?

A. There's hardly any end to the diversity of modes! Which is surprising, when you consider the present cult of what one might call the rococo—intense and often overwritten spasms of response to sensory experience. The sort of thing that is most modish at the moment is an intensively purple-patchy and artificially cultivated hothouse plant. Alongside such precious blooms you find an unrelated aspect of the subject that goes by the name of "communications"—as if such arbitrary distinctions were helpful to either teacher or pupil! And in behavioural terms, we must face up to the absurdity of a situation in which forty pupils are all expected to make a poem, simultaneously,

[17] See also, on this, John Passmore's essay in Peters, *op. cit.*

and before the bell for the end of the lesson rings! If we wish to encourage our pupils to become more resolutely and enterprisingly articulate, then we must give them as much opportunity as possible to make their own choices about their subject matter and their manner.

"Creative English" is not for me a matter of simply shuffling verse or words, but rather of establishing a relationship and an ethos which will promote experiment, talk, enquiry, amusement, vitality, bouts of intense concentration, seriousness, collaboration, and a clearer and more adequate self-knowledge. This will involve us in talk about our selves, our language, our behaviour, our attitudes and beliefs, and, when appropriate, in recording such things in writing. And the teacher's sense of his role is crucial. If he is prescriptive—knowing what *he* wants, knowing all the answers beforehand—he will be less effective than if he is prepared to allow the pupils' awareness of criteria to grow for itself in the business of making, modifying, and so on.

# A CAVEAT ON CREATIVITY

Reed Whittemore

Among educators "Creativity" is mostly a political word. It does not clarify but muddy. To favor Creativity is to be opposed to Programmed Learning, Science, and Linguistics, as well as to any going curricular system considered in its entirety, and to favor instead a variety of vague though ennobling educational alternatives to system, usually alternatives in the arts and humanities. Hence to the question, "What are the distinguishing characteristics of Creativity?" only a committee composed of political allies could be expected to produce a sensible answer, and that would tend to be a political answer. . . .

We must remember, as we look at students' poems and stories, that we (collectively, as a committee) cannot agree about what a creative act is. Not only that, we must remember that any teacher who professes to develop creative activity in his students (and almost all teachers do make such claims at one time or another) is sure to bring his own meaning for the word into play, a meaning inevitably charged with a variety of values, especially artistic or literary values, in which he has a large personal stake. For the word is simply such a word; it gathers our lives around it as

we use it. As a result this teacher, no matter what his meaning for Creativity may be, will be deeply involved in selling that meaning; he will, almost surely, whether he realises it or not, be prescriptive.

This point may seem obvious, yet if we look at the claims made for Creativity, we will find that it is used uniformly as a political word opposing alternative political prescriptions, and very commonly opposing prescriptiveness itself.

The prescriptiveness of a good "Creativity Programmer" (i.e., teacher of same) is probably to be rejoiced in rather than regretted, but if we are to see our subject whole, we have to acknowledge at the outset that "Creativity Programs" carry prescriptions with them just as do the programs of noisy disciplinarians. Furthermore we must note that Creativity prescriptions, since they are frequently hidden or denied, are hard to reckon with and are sometimes, in the hands of poor teachers, extremely pernicious in unexpected ways. For example, in America in the lower grades an easy identification is frequently made between little nuggets of teacher-imposed prosody and creativity itself. Such identification knocks hell out of poetry for the student, and may also lead him to think that Creativity, in or out of poetry, is a stupid enough thing and a small enough thing for him to get along very well without.

If these are political considerations, so be it. They remain, at the moment, at the heart of any pedagogical consideration of Creativity and cannot be divorced from it. So caution and open-mindedness in the use of the word is essential. . . . When we suggest that Creativity is a poem or story, let us hope that we understand, and our readers understand, that in suggesting this we are indulging in a nominalist fallacy, a fallacy that, if greatly indulged, can lead both teacher and student to imagine that Creativity only happens on Tuesday afternoons. . . . The real problem with Creativity is one that our Study Group couldn't begin to cope with in its few meetings, the problem of understanding the creative process itself and its relationship to other processes for which we also have names and little understanding, the critical process,

the imitative process, and so on. Perhaps given a little time, the linguists, and others who have long been regarded as political enemies of the Creative, will be able to help the conventional Creative Writing teacher as they cannot now—help, that is, in bringing him a fuller understanding of the process, and in suggesting exercises and programs radically unlike those normally offered. At least it would be unwise for any teacher conditioned to think of Creativity in terms of the conventional courses in it that now surround us, not to be open to such help if it should come along. Lord knows we need it.

# A FEW EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE ENGLISH

Geoffrey Summerfield

1. (Overheard in the playground.)
   a: Has he got a nickname?
   b: Dunno. Don't think so.
   c: What shall we call him?
   b: What about . . . ?
   a: Yes! Or . . . ?

2. (Overheard in the playground.)
   a: What's that, then?
   b: It's a tank.
   a: A what?
   b: A tank.
   a: How does it work?
   b: Don't you know?
   a: No. Show me.
   b: Well, you see this elastic band here . . . .

3. (Overheard during a girls' cookery lesson.)
   a: Who did you go out with?
   b: Allen Smith.
   a: What's he like?
   b: Well, I'm not sure really. He's all right, though.
   a: Why aren't you sure, then?
   b: Well, it's like this, you see. When he said "What do you want to do?" I said . . . .

4. (Written in an examination in response to the one word, *Punishment.*)

The young peasant girl had been hauled through from the hut in which she had been prisoner for three days and nights, into a larger and more spacious building where she was thrown in one corner. The door crashed shut behind her and the large room became darker and colder than it had seemed. She felt the tears on her cheeks become colder and colder and she brushed them away with the small woollen shawl about her arms and neck. She felt like killing herself there and then, she felt so wretched. She could not escape, there were too many guards, and anyway there was hardly any time left, she was to be ducked in the deep river which ran through the village, in less than fifteen minutes. She had asked for the Friar to say a prayer for her whilst she was in the big hut, but the so called Sheriff's magistrate had denied it her, "What would a witch like you, who heals village children and teaches them Black arts, want with a Holy man like our Friar," he rattled in his loud raucous voice. She was just another innocent woman wh had tried to practise more advanced methods of Medicine, than the local Apothacary and his crude methods.

The door of the hut opened violently, the two guards forged in and jerked her up by the arm pits and thrust her through the open door. Outside she was half blinded by the bright sunlight, but she had no time to get used to it, for immediately the guards pushed her along towards the river, the ducking stool, possibly death.

All along the cart track, she was jostled and jeered and shouted at by the women who had previously been her friends. They had turned out for a bit of excitement in life, and many of the families had brought food with them in case she had a slow death.

She was strapped by her wrists into the stool, and her back was strapped onto the high back of the seat. Next the magistrate lifted his hand and the two guards stood, ready to plunge the stool into the water. The magistrate dropped his hand and the helpless girl was ducked into the swift flowing water.

She was under for nearly thirty seconds. Then she was pulled out, soaking wet half full of water and half dead. The second time she was under for nearly one minute, and pulled out, unconscious; unconscious but not yet

dead. The third time she was held under for twenty seconds, and pulled out fat and full of river water, and waste of the river, she was dead.

But she was only one more innocent girl, killed torturously by the ignorance of man.

5. (During a discussion in the English lesson with boys and girls of thirteen.)

Teacher: . . . O.K., so you say he was prejudiced. John, any comment?

John: Well, he was in a way. I mean, look at the time he . . . .

Roger: Yes, but what about . . . .

Jim: Yes, but . . . .

Allen: No, he . . . .

Eric: You might think so, but . . . .

Teacher: O.K. Now let's have a look at another example.

*Two points here: first, that the gap between what pupils are thinking and what they actually say is, too often, a wide one. Part of the job of the teacher is to reduce this by creating a situation of free exchange, in which pupils do not shy away from the tentative uncertainties of thinking out loud, with all the hesitancies and self-correcting and self-cancelling steps that this entails. My second point is that the teacher does not wrap the thing up, encapsulate it in a ready-made definition, theory, cliché, or formula. Discussion should thrive on uncertainty, on exploration, on a collaborative groping, and should be left unresolved. The teacher's role is to reduce the possibility of the stock response, to inhibit the formulation of snappy once-for-all generalization. One of the ideal aims of such discussion is to lead away from dogmatic assertion whilst recognising and allowing a proper place for passionate conviction.*[18]

6. (The class have been listening to the teacher, reading Frost's poem, "Out, Out . . . ," and at the end of his reading, there is a silence.)

Teacher: *tacet.*

Class: *tacet.*

[18] (*Cf.* J. S. Mill's *Civilization* and *The Spirit of the Age;* and John Passmore's contribution to Peters, *op. cit.*)

*The silence lasts for perhaps a minute. Why break it? Why go blundering in with a string of questions, aimed at ensuring that the class have "understood" the poem. Look at the expressions on their faces. They have been present at a death: how irreverent, to start barking out questions!*

*Two of the distinctive characteristics of what I take to be good English teaching are that the teacher often sees himself as a means of transmitting a work of art, e.g., "Out, Out . . ." to a class; and that he ensures that, as often as possible, his pupils are exposed to works of art, so that the alchemy of imagination is practised and experienced.*

**7. (A class of twelve-year-old boys and girls have been having a drama lesson in the school hall. The material of the lesson has been the experiences of refugees and other victims of war. At the end of their lesson, they leave the hall and go back to their classroom.**

**In silence, they limp and stagger, haltingly and apparently in distress, along the corridor. The transformation still claims them.)**

**8. (Ostensibly "dull" children of thirteen have been reading Charles Causley's poem, "Timothy Winters," and in him they have recognised something of themselves and their friends. Timothy Winters "becomes" one of them. For weeks, they write stories, diaries, play scripts about Timothy Winters: he gets into all manner of scrapes and difficulties; they are writing, obliquely, about themselves, articulating their own world-view.)**

**9. (As a critic of Shakespeare once observed, there comes a point at which we no longer interpret literature, but it "interpreta" us.)**

**A class of eleven-year-olds have just read John Crowe Ransom's poem, "Janet Waking," for the first time. They move from the "virtual experience" of the poem into conversation, with the teacher, about their own "Wakings."**

**10. *A Chinese Approach* (from *NATE Bulletin*, Spring 1966, *Poetry*)**

**It seems to us that the school sometimes forgets that one of its chief duties is to introduce children to novel and varied cultural**

experiences: and that each experience can be made more fruitful by being linked imaginatively with others. It is not a question of creating arid pseudo-entities, such as "social studies" too frequently become, but of relating quite separate disciplines to each other, so that they interpenetrate and enrich each other. We believe that children should explore the history of, say, Australia and the American West as well as, or even instead of, the history of Elizabethan England, and that at the same time (this is, we feel, the more important point), they should study not only the geography of these lands but also their literature and music—the stories of Mark Twain and Henry Lawson, the songs of the Gold Rush and the outback. We should not esteem any aspect here more highly than any other: each would we think stimulate the imagination. The total imaginative gain, our experience leads us to predict, would be greater because each would be placed in a much wider context, and the variety of experiences enjoyed by the children would throw up a corresponding diversity of activity.

In some ways the junior school is the best place for such work. Even at its worst, the eleven-plus examination is less inhibiting than the G.C.E. [General Certificate of Education] is and the C.S.E. [Certificate of Secondary Education] is in many areas likely to become. It is easier for one class-teacher in any type of school to know enough, or even more important—to be enthusiastic about enough, to teach meaningfully the kind of topic we have in mind. This problem faced us when we taught such a topic to a junior school class, and we solved it in a way which, we suggest, might be followed by other teachers. We taught as a team of two, and we found the advantages of this to be considerable. To our chosen topic, medieval China, we brought different and complementary enthusiasms—history and architecture in one, literature and the plastic arts in the other. The historical competence of Box was matched by the histrionic abilities of Cox, and any resemblance to the music hall, even when unintended, helped a captive audience forget that they were there because they *had* to be. Flyting we avoided, but the occasional diversion provided by easy and good-humoured banter reminded the children that there are always at least two points of view.

The class we taught was an exceptionally intelligent and receptive one: 40 boys and girls of eleven—the "top" stream of three, in a school that combined high academic standards with novel and imaginative approaches. The parents encouraged their children and supplemented the resources of the school with books and material; the children were enthusiastic, knowledgeable, widely read, and many of them quite widely travelled. Nevertheless, we had the equivalent of only three whole days for our project—one afternoon a week for a half a term—and even if we had had three terms we

should have been faced with the overriding need to select our material very carefully from the apparently infinite mass presented by our topic. In planning our teaching, one of the first decisions we took was to approach it through a small family living in Peking in 1400 A.D.: people of vivid and contrasting personality who were yet representative, who would lead us into many aspects of Chinese culture, with whom our pupils might easily identify themselves and in whom they would certainly be interested. The historical sources available did not give us the kind of group we wanted. It is our belief that in planning most similar topics, teachers would find the same problem and would solve it in the same way; certainly we felt after our teaching that we had overcome this difficulty successfully. We created three generations of the Tzu family: Grandfather Tzu had a passion for breeding crickets and for making firecrackers; Father was a fisherman who employed picturesque and voracious cormorants for landing his catch; and the two children, boy and girl, were very slightly older than our pupils. We felt that the slight increase in age would serve to induce the willing kind of identification that we wanted. Furthermore, Grandfather, as a perfectly *normal* person, wrote poetry, and everybody else in Peking regarded this as a quite acceptable activity for anyone to engage in.

It seems to us that projects are often dehumanised, and that this is why children find them so boring: too much concerned with things and too little with people. Presented in this way, transport, farming, or houses are as arid, dull, and unstimulating to the imagination as the object lessons on gutta-percha and oranges that Matthew Arnold complained about. We began with our family—their lives and characters—and only then moved on to the house and city they lived in. We could find no good filmstrips or slides about ancient Peking, so we used an old-fashioned epidiascope to show the children pictures from several books. This technique has its disadvantages: it tends to damage the books and it is difficult to achieve really clear definition. But printed pictures are in general so much more accessible (and often richer) than filmstrips and slides that we should plan to adopt it again. On this occasion it brought near the visual texture of the houses, palaces, temples, and lakes of Peking as something very un-English, different but not therefore inferior. The effect was, rather, one of richness, profusion, and ingenuity.

Our first week had gone. For the remaining five, we explored Peking at two levels, which were interdependent. At the level of vicarious action, we took the Tzu family to the theatre and festival rituals and carnivals; we helped them to build a house, catch fish, fly kites, breed crickets. One of us introduced the class to the cosmology of the Tzu family. We limited this to the dragon-gods:

the fire-dragon, the water-dragon, the earth-dragon, and the air-dragon. We explored the way in which the Tzu family would see and feel the characteristic oscillations and undulations of the Chinese unwinged dragon in the movement of water, in the threatening sinuosity of flames, in the delicate motion of balmy air and the ravening winds of storm and tempest, and in the serrations of mountain peaks on the horizon. The children were quick to perceive the truth that each dragon, when peaceable, serves man's needs, and yet, when enraged beyond man's control, can destroy his civilisation through earthquake, flood, typhoon, and fire.

At the level of children's activity, we achieved less than we had hoped for, despite all our efforts at rigorous selection and exclusion, because we underestimated the time that would be necessary to build dragon-kites. We had planned to spend most of one afternoon doing this, but in fact it took the best part of two to make 40 large centipede-like structures, which burred, plunged, and turned somersaults furiously in a strong breeze. The children also engaged in some tentative Chinese mime, sailed a model junk on the school swimming-pool, and hung celestial guardians at the door of the classroom to protect us from evil spirits. They painted landscapes in the Chinese manner and assembled an elaborate panoramic frieze of Peking from their own drawings.

The children enjoyed most, however, writing poems in the Chinese style. We had early on introduced them to some authentic Chinese poems, in Arthur Waley's translations, when we talked about Grandfather Tzu, and they agreed that the poems were interesting presentations of interesting experiences. The brightest boy in the class was rather sniffy about the lack of a respectable rhyme scheme, but when we suggested that it was surely better for otherwise busy men (like Grandfather Tzu and Mao Tse-Tung) to write interesting poems without rhyme than to write no poems at all, he conceded the point. (He retaliated, later, with a subtle question about the distinction between dromedaries and Bactrian camels to which he already knew the answer.) He and his friends responded eagerly to the challenge of emulating Grandfather Tzu by writing Chinese poems about Chinese experiences.

Our methods were really very simple. First of all we read poems to them on the themes of war, nightmare, exile, and friendship. We then wrote some out on large sheets of paper so that they could see what they looked like; these we added to the Chinese bowls and spoons, table-mats, paintings (in reproduction), and the drawings of household gods with which we filled the room, so as to "saturate" the children in visual and tactile experiences of things Chinese. Some of the poems which we read were presented as coming from the hand of Grandfather Tzu. We then suggested that they might care to write poems either singly or in pairs on the various aspects

of Chinese life that had excited them, and that they need not worry unduly about rhyme. When these had been written, we wrote them out, again on large sheets of paper, so that within a fortnight the room was full of poems by the children themselves. The slower, more hesitant children were allowed time to rethink and refurbish their poems, being spurred on by the successes of their peers. Finally we duplicated most of the poems and produced a small booklet, decorated marginally with Chinese motifs of birds and dragons and bamboo, for example, which some of the class then painted, decorated, and elaborated as they wished. Copies of the anthology were then given to the Headmaster and to other members of staff, and the children also took their anthologies home for the entertainment of their families. Generally speaking, the poems were relatively artless, but they possessed a vividness and directness, an imagist quality, that seemed to us a worthwhile achievement. As so often happens, the value of the poetry resides not so much in the achieved artefact so much as in the experience of making and, through making, of knowing more fully and appreciatively, so that they could come back to the real thing with a keener responsiveness.

The children retained little sheer information, we feel sure, but we do not regard this as really damaging: the imaginative gain revealed by these poems was, we believe, a reward satisfying and positive enough. Our pious hope is that, when their elders and betters tell them that poetry is a mug's game or sissy, the children we briefly taught will remember Grandfather Tzu.

## CHILDREN'S POEMS

### *The Mountain Lion Attacks the Camel Train*

There he lies, waiting for his prey.
He sights them and pricks his ears,
Eyes glaring he stealthily creeps
Down to the beaten track he goes
Waiting for nightfall
Then he strikes
Camels trump in terror
Rearing and pulling at their ropes
Out rush their masters
One camel is wounded
Another breaks off and gallops off
A man aims with his rifle and—
The lion is dead.

—Pamela

*A Night's Work*

**The night is still and dark**
**As dark as a bandit's cave;**
**As quiet as the clock that doesn't tick**
**The junk stealthy as a fox**
**Steals into the middle of the river**
**The flames a ruddy orangey brown**
**Leap about like magic**
**Reflected in the water like dazzling bulbs at the fair.**
**The deep green cormorant grips the edge like death**
**Then comes the word and in they dive,**
**Crash! Wallop! Splash! as they dive in,**
**Wriggling they move to catch the fish.**
**The head fisherman cries "Quick, call up, boys."**
**The boys call up and out they come**
**The cormorants come boldly up**
**The fish are jigging trying to escape**
**But still the cormorants hold on.**
**The hold is full of fish**
**Not one is lying still**
**The boys are greatly pleased**
**So home they go after a long night's work**
**But all the same greatly pleased.**

**—Christine**

*The Dragon*

**The dashing dragon batters the crowds**
**As they run to smoulder it.**
**Fire-crackers whizz through the air**
**And go poing! poing! whizz! whizz!**
**Men's feet patter in the snow;**
**After a while they tire,**
**And set the dragon alight.**
**As the flames roar and crackle**
**The dragon smoulders.**

**—Pamela**

**10. (A class of thirteen-year-old boys in York in 1966 became interested in the nearby Battle of Stamford Bridge, 1066, the occasion of Harold's last victory before he dashed south, to be killed at Hastings. The teacher decided to devote about a half of their English time to working on the battle.)**

There were various "models" to hand for the shape to be assumed by work on such a topic: in literary terms, there were saga, ballad, elegy, riddle, and narrative; in visual terms, the Bayeux Tapestry. In auditory terms, there were numerous radio programmes, but especially relevant was a brilliant radio "collage," broadcast on the BBC *Third Programme,* which consisted of poetry, song, music, sound effects, eye-witness accounts, and historical commentary, all on the Battle of Hastings. None of the pupils had heard this.

The topic seemed to present an ideal occasion for breaking down the artificial subject barriers that divide teachers for most of the time. First they looked to history to find out as much as possible about the battle; they discovered in the process that there are good historians and bad historians and deduced something about the nature of evidence and its proper and improper use.

Discussion then followed about how much one could "say" in a radio programme and about the shape it should take. It was decided that "shape" could be left to emerge as the work got under way.

The boys chose to write a Ballad of Stamford Bridge. One of these provided the backbone for the whole programme, to be performed in a sprechgesang to the accompaniment of a guitar.

How did the Anglo-Saxons write about battles? This provided an opportunity to read suitable extracts from Michael Alexander's brilliant translation of Anglo-Saxon poetry.[19] The class were suitably impressed. Would they care to try their hand at writing in accordance with the conventions of Anglo-Saxon poetry? They would. The rules were partly deduced, partly explained, and they set to. Here is an example of one boy's attempt to create an effect of nocturnal desolation:

Silent sleeping slaves  no fire kept kindled
Hounds howling  in a forest far

[19] *Earliest English Poems,* tr. Michael Alexander (New York: Penguin Books, Inc., L172).

They were also intrigued by the Anglo-Saxon kennings and tried their hands at these.

They then wrote eye-witness accounts of the landing of the invaders' ships at Scarborough, the battle, and the plight of the defeated. At the moment they are still experimenting with the *job of recording* these against an evocative background of music. Rather than use naturalistic sound effects, they are using various musical instruments—guitars, violins, xylophones, gongs, cymbals, drums (plunking and banging—no musical dexterity involved)—in order to create the appropriate rhythms and noises.

The work is as yet unfinished, but after two terms they are still interested.

11. (A class of fifteen-year-olds have been reading some poems by Tony Connor, especially "Elegy for Alfred Hubbard" and "A Woman Dying." They are interested, puzzled, intrigued by the problems of coming to terms with the fact of death.)

For an hour they share experiences—about grandparents, great aunts, next door neighbours, about grief and deprivation, about funeral customs. The teacher senses their interest and so reads other literature on the same subject: Howard Nemerov's "Death and the Maiden" and passages from Dickens and H. G. Wells.

Their interest continues, and he asks them to write a short story or a chapter of autobiography. What they are attending to is not an exercise, but the colour, shape, and texture of their own lives, their own sense of life.

12. (There is a pop-singer on at the local theatre. The girls of fifteen can think about nothing else. With the guidance of the teacher, they write a letter to the theatre, asking if they may meet and interview him. Their request is granted. Three girls are chosen by the rest of the class. They take a portable tape-recorder with them.)

a. "The School's Broadcasting Station brings you an interview with . . . ."
b. School or Class magazine: "The Day I Went to Interview . . . ."

13. (A branch of NATE mounts a simple experiment: it consists of using the same piece of literature with pupils in three or four different types of secondary schools [grades 6-12], with pupils drawn from significantly differing social backgrounds. The literature selected is the "Triumphal March" from T. S. Eliot's *Coriolan*. This is what happened in the nonselective secondary modern school.)

The boys are twelve years old. There are thirty of them. Before the poem is distributed and the class are told that they are to make a recording of it, half an hour is spent in discussion. This starts with festive occasions and holidays, moves on to military parades, mass hysteria, excitement, and hero worship. Many aspects of the poem are already thus "in circulation" before the poem is given to them. From the background of discussion, they move without difficulty into the poem. All the class participate. The object of the exercise is not a polished choric-speech performance, but an understanding and enjoyment of the poem. If understanding and enjoyment prove incompatible, then understanding will go by the board.

Each boy is given a copy of the poem, the French words having been deleted with the exception of the last two lines of the poem. In the first lesson, the teacher begins by explaining that they are going to try something new, in the interests of experimentation, and that they might well end up in a cul-de-sac or up a gum tree, with nothing to show for all their efforts. The boys are conspiratorially delighted by the prospect of having nothing to show for their efforts. The teacher then reads the poem aloud, and the class discuss it.

Q. Stones—these stones in the first line: what are they doing there?
AA. Buildings. Cobblestones. Paving stones. Large city. High buildings. Squares. Steps.
Q. Steel?
AA. Bayonets. Armour. Helmets. Knives. Daggers. Guns. Missiles.
Q. Do we see all this now, in 1967?
AA. Red Square, Moscow. Churchill's funeral. When the Queen came to York.

Q. What's going on in the poem—is it happening now, or is it old Roman, like Julius Caesar?

AA. Both.

(They experience no apparent difficulty in superimposing past and present; all are spontaneously "biforal.")

Q. And what about the leader, the great man, the hero? Incidentally, what is a "great man"? Can you name some?

AA. De Gaulle. Kennedy. Julius Caesar. Churchill. Wilson.

Q. Interesting answers!

The poem fascinates them. The reason for such fascination must be different for each individual, but it has to do with war, weapons, heroes and hero worship, the excitement of high days and holidays, mass hysteria and flag-waving, the comedy of sausages and crumpets, and the rhythmic potency of the metrics; but most of all, perhaps, it is due to their own ambivalent attitude to authority and to persons in authority. They feel both respect for the hero, an ingenuous awe, and also disrespect, a touch of irreverence, an inclination to poke fun. The respect and awe seem to be due in part to the military-heroic aura surrounding the leader; the disrespect, to emergent working-class attitudes toward the Establishment.

Much of all this comes out, not during the preliminary discussion, but during the "to and fro" of opinion and interpretation that accompanies the performance and recording. This involves almost constant trial and error, a fair amount of sheer repetition and a tentative groping towards the appropriate tone and the relevant rhythm. (They annotate their scores as they proceed.) Attending to rhythmic variation—change of pace, modification of pause, acceleration, deceleration—this proves to be the most effective way of coming at the meaning and the organization of the poem. In this respect two details are especially interesting; there is an important and rather difficult change of rhythm at

> Dust of dust, and now
> Stone, bronze, stone. . . .

(What is "happening" here? Are we getting more or less cheerful? Etc.) and toward the end of the poem—the "Light Light Light"—is a subject of most fruitful variations. They try a *diminuendo decelerando* for bathos, despair, or weakness; and a *crescendo accelerando* for urgency, desperation, and hysteria. It is here, especially, that they learn most effectively to "perform" as a unified team, with a tense alertness so as to achieve a clean decisive "entry" and a satisfying degree of unanimity of tone, rhythm, and volume.

In order to sharpen the class's sense of rhythmic precision and control, the teacher decides, on the spur of a moment, to use a kettledrum; fortunately, there is a primary school in the basement of the Forster Act school building, and a drum is immediately forthcoming. The drum is used as a device of punctuation and as a means of achieving suspense, climax, and intensification; it is also, incidentally, useful as a tool for arresting the attentions of a lively class. Such percussive devices often meet with raised eyebrows: "What have they to do with poetry?" "Don't they smack of the Infants' School?" "Surely they are intrusive?" One respects a proper respect for poetry: one recalls the splendid chapter entitled "Leaving It Alone" in Victoria Brown's *The Experience of Poetry in School* (Oxford University Press), and any method which uses the poem as a means to an external end will clearly not do. The peculiar virtue of percussion is this: that in given cases, e.g., "The Daniel Jazz" of Vachel Lindsay, it can work as an effectively integral part of the collaborative task, and pleasure, of remaking the poem: an inflexible policy of allowing only a diluted form of practical criticism smacks, in the context of the secondary modern classroom, of preciosity, if not of stiff-neckedness. In the business of "performing" the poem, the boys come as near as they are ever likely to come to an appreciation of the poem. One is guided, then, by a pragmatic concern for appropriateness: the sophisticated and subtle dialectic of the seminar or the tutorial is not the stuff of which effective secondary modern teaching is made; if we are to get anywhere with literature in such a situ-

ation, what we do with our pupils must be characterised by the same vigour, zest, directness, and raciness as the best of the pop culture to which they are already addicted before they enter our classroom. Essentially, the point is simply this: that our handling of poetry must be, of all things, not primarily reflective, ecstatic, or analytic, but *active*; the direction that this activity takes will be determined by the specific quality of the individual poem, but it will in all cases be concerned with a clarification of the elements of the poem and will move towards a unified remaking of the poem; and if, in the process, there are numerous differences of opinion about interpretation, placing of stress, rhythm, and so on, all the better.

The conclusions that one may derive from this particular experience are fairly straightforward: that choral-speech, shorn of undue concern for elocutory finesse and for posh vowels, is a worthwhile activity; that, given an appropriate repertoire, the business of "producing" a poem is a useful, enjoyable, and demanding means of exploring the meanings of poetry. The pupils, given the impetus of a disciplined activity with a defined end in view, will go surprisingly far in their efforts to understand, to make sense of, something which at first sight appears intractably difficult.

What of the conclusions reached by the pupils? They approve of T. S. Eliot—think he is "smashing." And, with the slightest hint from the teacher, they set themselves to write their own triumphal marches.

14. (Rhyme is one of the more intractable poetic conventions, yet free verse easily degenerates into amorphousness. A class of thirteen-year-olds enjoyed the "fascination of what's difficult," so the teacher introduced them to haiku. Using examples from the work of Issa, he demonstrated the "rules," and he and the class then made one together. The necessary economy of the form and the sheer arbitrariness of the rules acted like salt to add savour to the task. It *was* a task, but not an onerous or tedious one; on the contrary, the classroom fizzed with the sheer intensity of their concentration.)

They made little poems, if you insist, but the effort involved was immense. Blake saw eternity in a grain of sand: these boys tried to pour their perception into seventeen syllables:

An old tree clothed in fungus.
The squirrel jumps in.
A chatter of excitement.

15. (A group of eleven-year-old children, with a reading age of seven, are looking at a large reproduction, in colour, of Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*.)

For about ten minutes they discuss, with the teacher, the appearance of the people in the picture, their clothes, their faces, the atmosphere of the room; then they talk about the composition of the picture, the way in which some people are in the foreground while others are less conspicuous, the way in which Van Gogh has used light and shade, and so on; finally, they "enter" the situation depicted by Van Gogh and explain how they feel to be in such a state. Some of them ask if they can write a story about it. Others have had enough of it.

16. (A class of fourteen-year-olds, speaking a nonstandard dialect, are introduced to the fact that nonstandard dialects contain many vivid, expressive words that don't exist in standard English. They are given about twenty-five examples, such as words to express emotions, feelings, textures, and moods; they are then asked to find out how many of them are still used by (a) their grandparents and (b) their parents. When they report back, the findings are discussed, and inferences are drawn.)

They enjoy writing stories in dialect, and try to find ways of spelling which accurately express the *sound* of the word; e.g., *shoy* for *shy*, *we'm* for *we are*.

They compile a short dialect dictionary for the benefit of teachers new to the area.

They also note how many local nouns disappear with the end of traditional crafts and occupations.

17. (The previous evening, a telephone kiosk near the school has been smashed by vandals.)

John: Sir, d'you hear about the 'phone?
Teacher: Yes—What do you think makes people do such a thing?

The class discussion continues for forty minutes; it ranges over such matters as the pleasures of destructiveness, resentment of authority, humiliation, malice, self-control, and so on. The teacher, during the discussion, recalls his own acts of hooliganism. He participates in the discussion as a human being, errant and fallible, not as an infallible pseudo-god; he also has a clear sense of his role, which is to raise and clarify, but not to resolve, currently interesting and perhaps urgent moral issues.

18. (The school is in a racially mixed area, where there is sporadic tension.) To a class of fifteen-year-olds, the teacher reads short stories by Nadine Gordimer, Dan Jacobson, James Baldwin, Bernard Malamud, and Doris Lessing. More often than not, the stories are left to speak for themselves; the teacher explains so as to clarify understanding when a difficulty of comprehension arises, but he does not draw explicit "morals" from the fables.

# EDITOR'S AFTERWORD

I am acutely aware of the uneasy feeling of having left a great deal unsaid, but there is the continuing consolation that what one has to say is merely part of a continuing conversation.

Meanwhile, an appropriate note to end a discussion of such a matter as this is one offered by the American poet, May Swenson, in the foreword to her delightful *Poems to Solve*.[20]

> Notice how a poet's *games* are called his "works"—and how the "work" you do to solve a poem is really *play*. The impulse and motive for making a poem and for solving and enjoying a poem are quite alike: both include curiosity, alertness, joy in observation and invention.

This paradox seems to me a particularly fruitful one, especially as providing a corrective to the fairly widespread assumption that "creative English" is *one* thing and serious work in English is *another*: that one "does" the first on Thursday afternoon and the rest in every other English lesson. If the fundamental premises of a creative strategy are accepted, then *all* the work is so contrived as to both feed and also feed on such things as "curiosity, alertness, joy in observation and invention": and the teacher who thinks he

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[20] New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966.

can *do* "creative English" in one smallish corner of the timetable has not, in the event, begun to comprehend such premises.

As for the notion that "creative English" is impossibly demanding of the teacher, it neglects the fact that such English serves to release and engage the energies *of the pupils*, who will work very hard because their work is, in May Swenson's sense, a game.

G. S.